

**‘Owning’ a marginal identity: shame  
and resistance in an Aboriginal  
community**

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## **Declaration**

Except as acknowledge in the text, the work presented in this thesis is my own original research, and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree or diploma at this or any other tertiary institution



**Natalie Kwok**



**This thesis is dedicated, with love, to my family**

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned to challenge existing theoretical preoccupations with the vanishing boundary, borderlessness and cultural hybridity. It is not to propose that neat fault lines of cultural difference can be detected and brought to the surface but, following Barth, to examine the way in which human groups employ and deploy cultural difference in the political act of staking, maintaining and defending boundaries. The thesis will argue with respect to the Aboriginal community of Jerrinja on the NSW south coast that cultural difference may be seen as cause, reason, strategic weapon and outcome of internally generated, and externally imposed, boundary making processes, which continue to define it and its members as a 'community apart'.

I will argue that while colonisation, globalisation and increasing mobility have made matters infinitely more complex, they do not lead uncompromisingly to the dissolution of boundaries. Lines of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and alienation, continue to be drawn across space and time, although these have inarguably become ever more complex, cross-cutting and shifting, as new grounds for both solidarity and distinction cut across family, class, race and nations. Boundary making does not dependent on spatial and territorial segregation; individual bodies and subjectivities are marked by, and attuned to, difference. Differentials in the desire for power must be taken into consideration in the motivation toward, capacity to effect, and outcomes of boundary making. The thesis will examine how in, the Australian context, cruder policies and practices of spatial and physical segregation have been in part replaced by more subtle forms of boundary maintenance, where subjectivities and bodily dispositions are informed by internal racism.

It is argued that shame is a significant, yet neglected, marker and maker of the divide. Shame can be seen as a mechanism of boundary maintenance in which pressures for social and moral conformity to both Aboriginal and mainstream standards are seen to

play out on the body, operating in the service of both black and white boundary-making and in the process reproducing community insularity. An appreciation for the processes of boundary making enables one to better embrace both sides of present anthropological debates over the relative importance of cultures of resistance and cultures of persistence in contemporary Aboriginal life worlds; it on the one hand necessarily involves opposition and distinction, and on the other, creates the cloistered space in which socio-cultural practices can be reproduced.

## Preface

There was a story told when first I arrived at the mission. I should have pinned each word down then; it was my job to catch them as they took flight and to press them down between pages, but I let them go. And then they got themselves all tangled up in the threads of tales that went before and came after, so that now I can no longer tell which bits really belong or what might be missing. But in the end it doesn't really matter. I will tell it as it comes to me now.

*Once upon a time, when the Koories were camped out about Beecroft, a white man came and befriended them. His name was Peter. He got on real good with them old people, sat down amongst them and yarned, wasn't afraid to eat their tucker, learned a lot from them about fishing and things. They took him in as one of their own. But there came a day, when the authorities wanted to get a hold of the blackfellas, wanted to find out where they were, and it was Peter who delivered them over, there on the beach, with the water lapping at their feet.*

On those first days at Jerrinja, I was keen as mustard to get down to the business of gathering data. So far as the thesis was concerned my intents were, to say the least, somewhat vague but, having reached an agreement that my fieldwork would be permissible in exchange for conducting research to support the community's claims to Native Title, there was work to be done. Wielding tape recorder and note book, I launched myself off around the mission to interview the people. My eager spirits were slightly dampened by some early technological hitches. While a detachable microphone - designed to minimise noise interference arising from the inner machinations of the cassette recorder - had sounded like a good idea in the pre-fieldwork seminars, the fact that it created an additional site for things to go astray (in this case not being switched on) made it more hindrance than help. But if embarrassment at my neglect knocked the

edges off slightly, a heavy warning from Delia, my sponsor on the community, that I was 'pushing too hard' and should 'back off', sent me flying. Tape recorder and notebook were hastily filed and, as things panned out, the two were destined to see precious little more light of day.

The premise that, as I became more familiar with people, it would become easier to interview them proved incorrect. The closer I came to people, the less and less comfortable I became with assuming the role of researcher. In the privacy of my room, I devised reams and reams of questions, but it never seemed quite the right moment to ask. On occasion, I would awkwardly draw out the tape recorder for an 'interview' but, at the slightest sign of hesitation, I would quickly withdraw it with self-conscious 'never minds'. I was trying to nurture new friendships and clearly something in the collection of data transgressed those bounds. Friendships after all are supposed to be about confidence and more than that they are reciprocal relationships; the actions of friends, it seems, should mirror each other. At the time, to cast aside obstacles to friendship, seemed the decent thing to do, but how I wish now I'd worn that tape recorder and note book on my sleeve, for though I desperately wanted to be a good friend, I never relinquished the role of researcher. My antennas were constantly out, offhanded remarks would be mentally filed away, pointed questions entered my conversation, and at night I retreated to my room and scribbled notes. How much more am I now in a position to betray friendships, as I come to write the things which, in many cases, I never openly asked.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

If, in its engagement with postmodernity, anthropology now looks out on a world 'where "open borders" appear more salient than "closed communities"' (Rosaldo 1993:45), where cultures are 'mobile, unbounded, open-ended and hybrid' (Moore 1999:9), a world of 'unbound nations, borderizations, and deterritorializations' (Behar 1996:145) where 'nothing is sacred, permanent, or sealed off' (Rosaldo 1993:44), it should not lose sight of the fact that boundaries, social, cultural and territorial, are, in fact, continually being staked, maintained and defended by human beings and social groups. The drawing of boundaries is an intensely political act. Inside(r) is distinguished from outside(r), me or us, from them. Boundaries emerge from our human desire to belong somewhere, to find identity and from the will to power over people and resources. The capacity to create and defend boundaries is heavily contingent on differentials in power.

Colonisation is the process by which one group invades the boundaries of the other, in the effort to claim that inside space as their own, erasing, displacing or marginalising the other in the process. The effort is directed not only at extending boundaries in space – over land and resources – but in extending the empire, physical and mental, over which the colonisers' orders of knowledge, truth and power can prevail. New boundaries are drawn by the dominant order to exclude and contain the colonised as they work to complete the process. On the other side of the equation, the boundaries of the colonised, their very physical integrity, their territorial and social domains, their distinctive identity are obliterated, threatened or severely weakened by the combined power of physical might, economic appropriation and hegemony. Maintaining boundaries for the colonised becomes a matter of survival. For this reason, warnings about the political implications of the post-modern destabilisation of the subject, are worth noting and might well be extended to encompass the destabilisation of group and cultural identities.

The current post-structuralist/post-modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses (Hutcheon 1995:130-131).

It is a remarkable thing that after two hundred years of colonisation, and in the wake of dispossession, institutionalisation and unyielding hegemonic pressure, distinct Aboriginal socio-cultural spaces persist, in tension with, but not subsumed by, the encapsulating mainstream socio-economic order. This thesis will contend that these spaces are maintained, in large part, through active processes of boundary maintenance, both on the part of Koories, who protect a place of belonging and cultural autonomy, and by the exclusionary practices of mainstream Australia. Such spaces, I will argue, hold ambivalent meaning in the lives of Koories, being experienced by them as both home - a zone of ease and security - and prison - the locus of their socio-economic marginalisation and deprivation. These spaces are not simply inscribed in space but are embodied in somatic practice and emotion. This thesis will, in particular, explore the place of shame - as it is engendered from both indigenous and colonial sources - as border sentinel.

It is now a matter of prosaic orthodoxy that anthropology cannot take, make or find neatly parcelled units of cultural difference - transfixed in time, confined in space and detached from the ebbs and flows of regional and global systems of power - for its subject of study. Any contemporary anthropological study of Aboriginal Australia cannot proceed without recognition that present social realities are a product of autochthonous socio-cultural complexes, themselves multiple, enmeshed and dynamic; a brutal colonial history - not without all its complexities of violence and engagement, resistance and accommodation, sexual fantasy and genocidal wishes, charity and exploitation - and the current position of Aboriginal peoples as an impoverished minority within the Australian nation-State.

## **In search of authenticity: anthropology and Aborigines of the south east**

While the temptation to produce ethnographies of Aboriginal life in remote Australia in the 'salvage mode', with minimal gestures toward the colonising presence, persisted until relatively recently, by definition it was never an option in the study of 'urban' Aborigines or the Aborigines of 'settled' Australia. Here the issues gravitated to the opposite extreme - the absence of authenticity. Three main phases may be distinguished within the relevant anthropological literature - although individual authors may be seen to straddle these divides – the first is premised on ultimate assimilation, the second emphasises cultural continuity and the third makes resistance its focus. These themes continue to mark the lines of contemporary debate.

R.H. Mathews (1896) and A.W. Howitt (1904), whose studies documented the last initiation ceremonies of the Shoalhaven and far south coast, were thought to have witnessed the final passing of Aboriginal traditional culture in the region at the turn of the nineteenth century. In the subsequent burgeoning of anthropological interest in Australian Aborigines, the inhabitants of the south east and other more settled regions of the country were bypassed, their standing in both popular and academic opinion being that of decultured and sociopathic remnant groups, irretrievably disconnected from the traditions of their ancestors.

It was not until the 1940s, that academic attention returned to the south-east with a spate of studies of NSW 'mixed bloods' being conducted over the next few decades (eg. Reay 1945, 1949, Reay and Stiltington 1948, Fink 1957, Bell 1956). Renewed interest in these populations was stimulated not so much by an intrinsic interest in their lifeways, but as a product of their ideological constitution as an intractable social problem. Oriented toward investigating their 'social and psychological problems' (Elkin cited Gray 2000:186) and to finding causes for the failure of governmental assimilation policies to effect their absorption into mainstream life, the studies of the period can be viewed as an early experiment in applied anthropology. Elkin, who as Professor of the University of Sydney oversaw many of the projects, served concurrently as vice-president of the Aborigines Welfare Board from its inception in 1940 until its disbandment in 1969 (Gray 2000:178). The strong interdependency between government and the academy was demonstrated in the influence of

administrative preoccupations in research directions, in sponsorship and funding arrangements and in the incorporation of research findings in policy development.

In rhetoric, the authors of the period give a distinct impression of a people whose diminution in Aboriginal blood is being matched by a fading away of cultural distinctiveness and whose ultimate destiny is assimilation into mainstream society. Aboriginal culture, examined for vital signs, is declared dead or dying. Effaced by the impact of colonisation, those most visible signs of difference - black skins, indigenous languages, ceremony, complex kinship terminologies - had 'departed' and material culture and technologies derived almost solely from European sources. Beyond nostalgic reminiscences (Fink 1957:109) and 'a few vestiges' (Fink 1957:103), most found little evidence of the survival of traditional Aboriginal culture. Bell writes,

Generally speaking, the part-Aborigines of New South Wales have no culture of their own to preserve. There is the odd exception of a settlement where a few attenuated features of traditional life hang on, but these have little relevance to the people's way of life. The traditional social structure and culture have long since vanished (Bell cited Sutton 1998:75).<sup>1</sup>

Beckett similarly notes the loss of 'nearly every cultural feature characteristic of their traditional way of life' and finds that 'culturally, these people now bear a closer resemblance to isolated communities of poor whites than to their own tribal ancestors' (Beckett 1964:34). In a passage, likely penned by Elkin, it was concluded their distance from the 'primitive nomadic way of life' of their forebears meant that 'the so-called "aborigines" of New South Wales are for the most part not truly aboriginal in the accepted sense of the word' (Aborigines Welfare Board 1945:5).

The writers depict their subjects as caught in a liminal space, bereft of the culture of their forefathers and not yet competent to handle what is seen to be their (European) cultural destiny.

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<sup>1</sup> Although as Sutton notes Bell presents a different assessment of the persistence of Aboriginal patterns

When it is considered that 95 per cent of the so-called aborigines in NSW are half and light castes, whose former social fabric has been torn asunder by the onrush of Western civilisation, and who if left alone would have neither the traditional background of the aboriginal way of life nor the culture of the white man to stabilise and guide them, the need for this (assimilation) policy should be abundantly clear (Aborigines Welfare Board 1948:3).

Reay's prognosis was that the failure of the 'culture of (the) group to adjust to radically changed external conditions' had left them in a 'pathological condition of disequilibrium' (1949:112). While some twenty five years later a similar sentiment is echoed by Eckermann,

Aborigines are frustrated in their efforts to become full members of the community. Aborigines who are caught in a culture vacuum, suffer most from disorientation exhibited in hopelessness and apathy (Eckermann 1973:31-32).

Studies of the period are not without some account of the persistence of classical Aboriginal beliefs and customs in areas such as kinship, marriage arrangement, medical epistemology and treatment and spiritual belief (see Reay 1945, 1949, Hausfeld 1961). Reay revealed that beneath external surfaces - characterised by European clothing, shearing work, and the ubiquitous radio, iron bedstead, film star's photograph and S.P betting cards (Reay 1949:90) - Aboriginal lives in north-west New South Wales continued to be distinguished, in varying degrees, by the conduct of 'specifically Aboriginal activities', the retention of 'tribal attitudes and sentiments' and by persisting 'knowledge of and sympathy with tribal institutions which are no longer operating' (1949:90). Difficult tensions between commitments to traditional Aboriginal values and group solidarity, and ambitions for mainstream acceptance were identified, with the two seen as mutually incompatible. Inevitably, however, the commentary gives way to an acceptance of the inevitable demise of Aboriginal traditions in which Aboriginal people are seen to accede,

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of social organisation elsewhere (Sutton 1998:75).

They are aware of the opposition of aboriginal and European values in their lives, and they are also aware that their destiny as a group is ultimate extinction and absorption (Reay 1949:113)

A number of authors of the period noted deep schisms within the Aboriginal community, between those whose values, standards of living and aspirations most closely approximated Europeans and an underclass whose lives were characterised by communal living, poverty and recklessness, who actively spurned European social sensibilities and ambitions (Reay and Stiltington 1948, Fink 1957). In line with their assumptions about Aboriginal destiny, however, these differences were interpreted, as successive stages in a trajectory toward ultimate Europeanisation. 'The different local groups,' writes Reay, 'can be said to represent different stages of transition, different levels of civilization or different degrees of learning European customs and manners' (Reay and Stiltington 1948:181).

It would be fair to say that for the researchers involved, their own findings proved more than a little unsettling. An uneasy tension can be detected between their commitments, and those they purport to their Aboriginal subjects (Reay and Stiltington 1948:207, Fink 1957:104), to the ultimate desirability and inevitability of assimilation and their findings of formidable intransigence on the part of both white and black. Contradictions, for instance, are to be found between analyses presenting the Aboriginal predilection for 'clinging' to the group as a conservative obstacle to assimilation (Reay 1949:117) - with its implication that dispersal might present the best solution - and the documented lack of success of those who had already gone to considerable lengths to dissociate themselves from their Aboriginal kindred. The refusal of whites to allow Aborigines access to mainstream circles is found to be matched by a recalcitrance on the part of Aborigines, which while *interpreted* negatively within the frames of the work as reactionary and moribund, is *shown* to be underlain by a positive political consciousness and an alternative moral code in which the ethics of sharing, relatedness, egalitarianism and racial loyalty prevail. Fink finds that in spite of their apparent lack of cultural distinction, the so-called 'lower group' of Aborigines regard themselves as "blackfellows" ' , 'look... upon white people and their ways of living as undesirable and tend... to reject many values commonly associated with white people (Fink 1957:103).

If these writings, then, are recognisably steeped in assimilationist logic, to dismiss them on these grounds is to miss their richness and complexity. For all the talk of cultural loss, disintegration and deficiency, and in credit to their faithfulness to the data, the works reveal the flourishing of distinctive traditions emergent from, and yet - wrought through the trials of colonisation - significantly different from classical Aboriginal forms. The identification of the tenacity of self-conscious Aboriginal identity culture and a shared oppositional stance toward white ways was groundbreaking, even if in the context of conservative contemporary definitions of culture, they could not be read as signs of cultural vitality.

The publication in 1964 of the edited volume 'Aborigines Now' marked a major sea change (Reay 1964). Backgrounded by an upsurge in anti-colonial movements abroad, local Aboriginal resistance to assimilation policies had begun to be taken seriously as expressions of separate and self-conscious political and cultural identity. The strength, pervasiveness and affective nature of the kin ties, which bound Aboriginal people within webs of relationship, were now heralded by anthropologists as distinctive and positive features of Aboriginal life. Policy attempts to facilitate individual assimilation, by breaking up these forms of association and enforced dispersal, became - with some dissent (see Bell 1964, Eckermann 1973) – subject to critique on ethical grounds. Although anthropologists were, in fact, contemporaneously documenting the *lack* of integration of Aboriginal communities, riven along family and local affiliation lines, in the context of broader political and intellectual shifts, the notion and value of the 'Aboriginal community' and 'community development' had now been elevated to centre stage.

Countering the earlier academic emphasis on cultural loss, social disintegration and lack of authenticity, the focus of revisionist anthropological accounts of Aboriginal society in south-east Australia, in the 1970s and 1980s, turned on the themes of cultural continuity, regeneration and social solidarity. Indigenous people of settled Australia were found to exhibit, and to rigorously defend, a distinctive culture and self-conscious Aboriginal identity founded both in indigenous tradition and in shared histories of struggle. Greater credence and attention was placed on the persistence of pre-colonial cultural forms, albeit modified, in the contemporary context. Barwick



described indigenous traits as being 'compounded' and 'blended' with introduced traits in an historically produced mix (1971:27), but the analyses grew more sophisticated over time. Macdonald, in her analysis of Wiradjuri fighting, posited that despite significant change, particular cultural practices, social orientations and outlooks were underlyingly informed by traditional world views.

Whilst by outward appearance Koories in central NSW may seem to have lost touch with their traditional social patterns, they reveal in the fight (as in various other social activities), traits and values which have always given, and continue to give them their distinctive Wiradjuri world view (Macdonald 1988:180).

The continuing centrality of kinship in organising group relations and identity was repeatedly affirmed (Beckett 1965, Barwick 1971, Kitaoji 1976, Macdonald 1986, Schwab 1988, Birdsall 1988). Aboriginal groups, based on kin relationships, were found to operate as socially and politically solidarious groups who carefully guarded their membership. An identity which emphasised Aboriginal cultural distinction from the mainstream, their adherence to an alternative moral code, an oppositional stance and their shared sense of victimisation found expression through the cultivation of distinctive <sup>'blackella'</sup> styles (Macdonald 1986, Schwab 1988), while rights and interests were being pursued through political organisation (Barwick 1964:25).

The 1988 volume *Being Black*<sup>2</sup> (Keen 1988) was seminal, drawing together a number of works by young authors, as well as the earlier writings of Beckett and Barwick which had foreshadowed its themes. Contributors pointed to the distinctive indigenous formations underlying contemporary kin structures (Barwick, Schwab, Beckett, Birdsall), linguistic style (Eades), economic modalities (Sansom), fighting (Langton) and swearing (Macdonald). In its conception and execution the volume came under flak for naivety, romanticism and political tendentiousness; Morton describing it as a 'mythic response in the joint service of Aboriginal and anthropological identity' (1989:11). At the same time that intellectual projects, of this

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<sup>2</sup> Although most contributors were as much concerned with the forging of contemporary Aboriginal identity in the context of historical and contemporary race relations as with a simple notion of traditional persistence.

type, were criticised for attempting to rescue Aboriginal authenticity, assertions of cultural continuity by Aboriginal people themselves were being derided as exercises in conservative and mystifying essentialism (see Keffe 1988).

In her recent work, Macdonald (2000, 2001) has pursued the themes of her earlier work in further depth. She has argued that rigid intellectual frameworks and colonial political interests have, together, been responsible for spectacular blindness to continuities in culture, amongst the Aboriginal people of 'settled' Australia. Structural and functionalist anthropologists, with their static view of culture, located tradition in the persistence of reified cultural forms; their apparent demise in 'settled' Australia being equated with the politically convenient death of culture (2001:184, 190).

Drawing on more recent conceptualisations of culture as a process of continually negotiated structures of meaning and practice, Macdonald finds that significant continuities have been maintained at the 'deep' structural level in the face of changes wrought by colonisation (2001:189). She points to the robustness of 'higher order structures of morality, value orientation and social relatedness' (2001:182) which come into play in social action; which confront and effect change and which are, in turn, modified by it. The voluntary or forced adoption of European material artefacts and practices is denied automatic power to transform Aboriginal culture in keeping with their originating logic; rather the meanings and forms of such artefacts and practices are themselves found to be volatile and subject to metamorphoses in the process of their incorporation into the lifeworld of Aborigines (2001:192).

In her article, *Economies and Personhood*, Macdonald (2000a) documents the persistence of the traditional Aboriginal logic and morality of demand sharing in contemporary Wiradjuri communities, within a context of substantial economic and political transformation. Macdonald finds that the internal Aboriginal economy continues to be guided by classical socio-economic principles, at the heart of which is the obligation to give in response to the demands of certain related others without expectation of a commensurate return. She presents a complex picture of the possibilities, constraints, pressures and innovations for actors struggling to adhere to such moral imperatives where changes in the nature and availability of transactable resources, new bureaucratic dictates and other environmental shifts must be reckoned

with<sup>3</sup>. It is, according to Macdonald, the failure to adequately acknowledge the tensions between indigenous and mainstream economic and moral systems that have produced growing levels of conflict and misunderstanding within Aboriginal communities and between these communities and the nation-state.

The third phase of anthropological research, in respect of the Aborigines of settled Australia, galvanised in the late 1980s around the themes of resistance and opposition. Under the influence of Foucault, writers turned their attention to the creation of regimes of truth and knowledge and to techniques of power operating upon the body (see Cowlshaw 1988, Carter 1988, Morris 1988, 1989). Echoing back to some of the earlier writers (especially Fink 1957), these accounts found, in the everyday and mundane practices of Aboriginal life in urban and close rural settlements, evidence of strategic resistance and defiance on the part of the subordinate minority, which served to subvert the dominant social and economic order. With hegemony looming large and the integrity of the subject called into question, the prognosis from some quarters was that true cultural authenticity could only be located in the shared historical experience and ongoing battle against oppression. Morris writes,

They could not continue to develop their own independently determined form of culture and consciousness. Instead, the cultural forms, practices, values and the structures of attitudes and feelings generated in this period developed largely as concrete forms of resistance to the attempts by the wider society to impose a coercive structure. We are dealing with a 'profane' culture...developed through concrete forms of struggle (1988:47).

Cowlshaw's more recent work (2004) reaffirms the same themes. Traces of autochthonous difference are found to have all but drained away under the impacts of colonisation. Aboriginal alterity, once again, derives its substance from the shared traditions of suffering, struggle and loss attendant on being members of a colonised, dominated indigenous minority. Yet confoundingly, Cowlshaw gives Aboriginal 'colonial rage' a short history too, arguing that racial hostilities are the products of relatively recent changes in government policy aimed at removing structural

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<sup>3</sup>The specificities of Macdonald's argument are to be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

inequality and that Aboriginal complaints have been informed by mainstream 'discourses of victimology' (2004:79).

Such assertions beg further attention, and to these matters I will return later; for now however, let me observe that whatever the analytic overlay and whatever 'essence' was found at heart, the thing which comes through persistently in every phase and in every account - over a period in which Aboriginal life has become more thoroughly enmeshed in mainstream society and its accoutrements - is the maintenance and ongoing recreation by Aboriginal people of a social identity separate and distinct from whites.

### **Of Barth and boundaries**

In her book *Caging the Rainbow* (1998), Merlan has proposed the concept of the intercultural as panacea to what she sees as the problematic analytical creation of distinct and separate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal socio-cultural domains, where influence - generally conceived to operate in the Australian context in only one direction - is constituted as an external force upon internally coherent systems. According to Merlan both traditionalist and non-traditionalists have succumbed to this view; traditionalists focused on the radical alterity and separate lifeworlds of Aborigines; non-traditionalists mesmerised by strong external determinism; the two approaches leading to an unproductive divergent emphases on persistence and change. Opposed to this, Merlan prefers to see both Aborigines and non-Aborigines operating and interacting within a shared, contemporaneous world. Here, the cultural material from which specific subjectivities are constituted is drawn from a continuous field, albeit one which is marked by structural inequalities. Cultural difference is not denied but explanation of its production and reproduction, it is argued, must be grounded in complex not separatist social histories. Merlan's call is for greater emphasis on relations between structure and process, on interaction, and on reflexivity, the

'looping, back-bending, circling or recursing' [Wiley 1994:74] dimensions of interaction fundamental to the creation of subjectivities and social positionality, as well as on kinds of knowledge, awareness and discursivity (2002:5).

While these points are well made, from my perspective the continuity and interwoven fabric of the ideological, moral, political and material fields from which individual and group subjectivities and cultural worlds emerge is not in question, what is in more pressing need of explanation is the persistence and reproduction of distinction.

In seeking to understand the nature of the endurance of Aboriginal socio-political identity and relative cultural autonomy I turn to an anthropological classic, Barth's 1970 study, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Barth's work provides a productive shift in perspective for it directs us to look for continuity, not in some genealogy of culture, *but in the persistence of the group itself*, a persistence achieved through the insistent upkeep of the boundaries between itself and other. Barth's argument is encapsulated by his observation - extracted with some licence from its original context - that it is 'the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (Barth 1970:15).

Rejecting an understanding of cultural diversity based on metaphoric islands of geographic and social isolation, Barth began his study with the question of how ethnic groups could persist over time given the continual flow of information, cultural knowledge and personnel across their boundaries (1970:9-10). His primary thesis is that groups are not defined by cultural differences *per se*, since particular cultural features are not coincident with or constrained by group boundaries, or fixed in time, rather, cultural differences are made socially meaningful in maintaining distinctions and organising relations between groups. Ethnic groups, he argues furthermore, are not sustained by isolation but by the structuring of interaction between them. Cultural difference is preserved in, through and despite interaction, by exercising controls on the extent and nature of articulation between groups (1970:13-14).

According to Barth, an essential feature of the ethnic group is its capacity for ascription of its members and exclusion of outsiders (1970:14). The ethnic boundary sets the line between 'us' and 'them'. In the formation of group identity, Barth writes of the acceptance of stereotypical signs of membership, of 'the selection of signals for identity and the assertion of value for these cultural diacritica, and the suppression or denial of relevance for other differentia' (1970:35). The construction of an ethnic

identity is fundamentally seen as a political manoeuvre used to organise interaction between groups. In oppositional struggle, Barth notes, political innovators actively, although perhaps not always consciously, work to codify a politically useful cultural identity. Furthermore, he notes, 'a great amount of attention may be paid to the revival of select traditional culture traits, and to the establishment of historical traditions to justify and glorify the idioms and the identity' (1970:35).

The integrity of the ethnic group is maintained by active processes of boundary maintenance, which serve to limit and structure group interaction. What is required, Barth posits, is:

a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation of some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification (1970:16).

In minority group situations<sup>4</sup>, Barth noted, these cloistering mechanisms would be particularly important, since inter-group transactions would inevitably be conducted within the framework and terms of the dominant group. 'Contrastive cultural characteristics' of the minority group, he wrote, would in the main be confined (and safe-guarded) 'backstage' (1970:32). The 'backstage' provides an arena for the expression of cultural difference. In this space, group members could operate across a broad range of activity according to their shared values and standards. Through his concept of the backstage, Barth's thesis explains the possibility of, and conditions for, cultural continuity (in its most conservative sense), showing that transformation, creativity, interpretation and reinterpretation are not opposed to the continuity of the group.

Viewed from the perspective of contemporary theories of power and the production of subjectivity, Barth's envisagement of the maintenance of cultural difference through

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<sup>4</sup> Barth's interests lay particularly with those social systems where long-standing and relatively equilibrium relationships between ethnic groups had been established but he noted that minority group situations presented a special case.

the intentional insulation of cultural sectors from interaction might be counted naïve. The implication of the State and prevailing socio-economic orders in the penetration and construction of space, time, person and identity cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, the process Barth describes is useful in explaining the persistence of minority groups; and the degree of success or compromise involved in hegemonic penetration is something to be examined, not assumed or dismissed.

### **Aboriginality-as-resistance**

In the light of Barth's work then, I return to take up Morris' assertion - that Aboriginal people were unable to retain cultural autonomy in the face of white domination, except as a product of their shared resistance to it - and to engage more broadly in a debate which surfaced in Australian anthropology, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, around the analytical deployment of concepts of 'oppositional culture' and 'resistance' in studies of Aboriginal culture and race relations.

Morris' *Domesticating Resistance: the Dhan-Gadi and the Australian State* (1989) was one of a number of resistance studies which, focusing on Aboriginal experience in urban and close rural settlements, discovered in the everyday and mundane practices of life, evidence of strategic resistances and defiances on the part of the subordinate minority which were subversive of the dominant social and political order. The intellectual fracas centred largely around Gillian Cowlishaw's 1988 book, *Black, White or Brindle*. The most controversial aspect of Cowlishaw's work - for as she has noted the main arguments of her book received less attention - was her assertion that Aboriginal unruly behaviours, including drinking, swearing and fighting could be counted as elements of an oppositional culture. Her argument was that by flaunting contempt for white values and sensibilities, Aborigines countered their own social rejection and challenged white hegemony. Cowlishaw's critics argued that her analysis underestimated the power of hegemony and they discounted the significance of these acts as forms of resistance, maintaining that the analysis did little more than show they constituted a distasteful affront to white refinement. 'To be a pitied and despised public embarrassment,' writes Rowse, 'because one violates value consensus

is only in a very weak sense to be a threat' (Rowse 1991:190). The detractors accused her of romanticising behaviours that were self-destructive and socially harmful. The concept of resistance, it was argued, should be saved for those political acts productive of, or potentially productive of, structural change.

Although I share something of the sentiment of the critics of 'resistance' writings, I do not negate the productive understandings of race relations and power and subversiveness brought to light through this style of analysis. Their exploration of the power of hegemony is potent, and by identifying insubordination as a permanent condition of power relations (Foucault 1982:225), these analyses rail against conceptions of totalising power and restore a degree of autonomy and agency to the oppressed. By tracking resistance back they can be used to uncover the microphysics of power, 'to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used' (Foucault 1982:211).

My concern relates to the danger of fetishisation of the practices identified as 'oppositional culture'. Both local meanings and hegemonic effects vanish in favour of oppositional value. This decontextualisation of particular practices, reducing them to modes of resistance, turns them to farce, and, contrary to intent, makes the dominant regime the prime source of meaning. It is the very ambivalence and ambiguities of these 'weapons of the weak' that makes them both a tool of resistance and a tool of oppression and something in themselves as well. To be fair, hegemony is far from being absent in these texts - it is the very grain against which they are set - but at an ethnographic level its implication in Aboriginal cultural practices is not adequately scrutinised<sup>5</sup>. That these 'resistance' accounts are offered as a corrective to 'sympathetic or sorrowful' accounts (Cowlshaw 1993:185) vantageing oppression, does not change the fact that, outside of a fuller exploration of the meaning of practices, both in themselves and in their articulation within networks of power and subordination, our understanding is inadequate.

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<sup>5</sup> Cowlshaw's work does not purport to represent an emic view of Aboriginal life, it is primarily an ethnographic study of white citizens in western NSW.



Taking a street riot in Bourke as its touchstone, Cowlshaw's latest book, *Blackfellas Whitefellas and the hidden injuries of race* (2004) once again brings the contemporary black/white race frontier in Australia under scrutiny. Unsettling interpretations of the racial divide as representing the last bastion of rural ignorance, this divide is found to occupy a central place in the daily life, institutions and psyche of the nation (2004:6). Cowlshaw's analysis is a complex and rigorous one, where goodwill is considered as suspect as outward racist hostility; the assumption by Aborigines of a victim persona as open to question as the internal biases of the law. In examining the persistence and pervasiveness of the racial divide, the book looks at investments on both sides in the maintenance of separate identities and explores the way in which identities, social meanings and morals are mutually constructed by the groups in opposition to, and in interaction with, each other (2004:4). Cowlshaw reiterates her view that in the contemporary context Aboriginal identity draws its distinctiveness and meaning, not from separate precolonial traditions, but principally in opposition; from the experience of, and struggle against, oppression, marginalization and cultural loss (2004:195).

The subject of violence and its place in marking the racial divide is a critical and valuable theme of the book. Giving recognition, on the one side, to the countless and minute ways in which Aboriginal people are daily subject to symbolic, hegemonic and state violence, Cowlshaw turns serious attention to the meanings of the violence perpetrated in the other direction across the race divide. Countering dominant explanations that disorderly, destructive and violent behaviours of Aborigines are symptoms of depravity deriving from deprivation, Cowlshaw sets herself the task of exploring a more complex set of causes and meanings based in local Aboriginal understandings and in the dynamics of race relations. In the first place, Cowlshaw finds that violent and unruly behaviours may be accounted for, in part, by different Aboriginal styles of interaction and physicality; although she is at pains to point out that such differences should not be presumed to represent continuous forms of classical Aboriginal social interaction (2004:144). Ethnocentric misunderstandings of rowdy social interaction, coloured as they may be by racist fears and anxieties, sometimes precipitate turns of events that may, as Cowlshaw shows in the case of the riot, lead to dramatically unexpected outcomes.

Beyond innocent demonstrations of difference, however, the display of Aboriginal styles in public can, in Cowlshaw's view, entail subversive intent (2004:163).

Murris, she maintains, mischievously play upon white fears and anxieties to effect occasional inversions of the dominant order. A central argument of the book is that through parody - through voluntary, exaggerated and grotesque performances of 'Aboriginality' - blackfellas both highlight and subvert the negative racial stereotypes maintained about, and held against them, in the mainstream (2004:93). The interplay of negative stereotypes is found to powerfully effect interactions between black and white. In her analysis of the riot, Cowlshaw maintains that the oppositional positioning of the police as powerful and authoritarian keepers of order, invited the Murris involved to take up the delinquent role in which they had been cast.

Taking up another strand of the complex whole, outbursts of violence are represented as the public edge of a deeply harboured sense of injustice. On one level, such violence may be interpreted as a direct reaction to the insult, injury and disadvantage persistently inflicted on Murris by the dominant order (2004:251). Furthermore, Cowlshaw contends there is a more radical, if inchoate, political purpose in the Murri deployment of violent excess (2004:237). Cowlshaw sees it as significant that Murri destructiveness is pointedly aimed at the twin bastions of white society, private property and public propriety. Violent excess on the part of Murris not only disturbs mainstream sensibilities but it threatens, if only briefly, public and hegemonic order. Additionally, what Cowlshaw asks us to grasp is that Murri violence serves as a catalyst for exposing the true hand of the law and the true nature of the relationship between the races (2004:162). For all our civil and liberal sensitivity to and disavowals of violence, violence underlies the authority of the nation-state and, in particular, its relationship with indigenous people. Violence on the part of the dominated brings the full force of the dominant openly to bear, its brute force then backed up by a legal system which for all its bowings to orthodox understandings of Aboriginal disadvantage, once again reaffirms the relation of domination in which the power wielded by Murris to uphold their meanings and interests is significantly limited.

In this study, then, Cowlshaw has seriously addressed the under analysis of the activities heralded as instances of resistance in her earlier work. On the other hand,

activities which are posited as representing subordination remain, by the lack of concerted analytical attention, deprived of fuller meaning. Shame, according to the logic of Cowlshaw's argument, is to be disdained as cultural surrender. Commending the value of opposition, she writes,

Were Aborigines passive and silent in the face of such judgements there would be little need for the vilification to continue. There would be no point in continuing to actively dominate a population that had accepted subordination. Rather than showing shame, oppositional culture acts as both a challenge to those who would despise Aborigines, as well as a defence against them (1988:234).

In my reading of Cowlshaw's recent book, shame lies in the province of those 'timid, humble and peaceable Murris [who] try to avoid stigma by exaggerating their respectable social practices,' (2004:184) of those who succumb to an internalization of negative evaluations (2004:184), of those who are ashamed of being black - 'even being dark is experienced as being shameful at times' (2004:183) - of those co-opted into mainstream, future-oriented aspirations (2004:191). Shame lies at the opposite and less honourable end of subversion - 'I also suggest,' writes Cowlshaw, 'that subversion is an alternative to subservience' (2004:184).

This thesis will be concerned to challenge this equation by exploring the meaning and experience of shame in its full complexity. Because, as I will argue, it is critically implicated in the maintenance of the boundaries which defend cultural autonomy – both as the painful product of racist exclusion and as positive signal of independent Koori sensibilities and agency – shame is not inconsistent with resistance.

Kevin Keffe's examination of the themes of resistance and persistence in the self-construction of Aboriginality forms another axis in the abovementioned anthropological debate (Keffe 1988, Lattas 1993). Failing to understand the importance of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1985) in the political struggles of oppressed peoples, Keffe's concerted efforts to debunk Aboriginality-as-persistence contrast with his heroising of the concept of Aboriginality-as-resistance. The latter,

he argues, 'is more active, conscious, dynamic, modern and political' (1988:73). He writes further,

those inspired by this ideology are engaged in the conscious production of new cultural forms, drawing creatively from the resources of the dominant society, and from Aboriginal traditions, but not setting out to discover lost objects from the past (1988:80).

With notable inconsistency, Keffe exalts the capturing of the past for Aboriginality-as-resistance while denying and invalidating the creative capacity involved in producing essentialised subjectivities<sup>6</sup>. Much as I find these aspects of his argument problematic, it is the implication that the only options for Aboriginal identity available to urban Aboriginal people are his 'illusory and idealist' category of Aboriginality-as-persistence, a construction liable to be co-opted and contaminated by State intervention, or the oppositional and political Aboriginal-as-resistance, which is in most need of re-examination.

### **Ethnography and the understanding of resistance: Ortner's critique**

Sherry Ortner's critique of resistance studies (1995) is directed against those strains of analysis<sup>7</sup>, lying outside the discipline of anthropology, that celebrate the subordinated or subaltern in their strategic subversion of dominant regimes, without seeking an understanding of the 'political and cultural worlds' (1995:188) which the subalterns occupy. Resistance studies, she argues, are 'thin',

thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjectivity - the intentions, desires, fears, projects - of the actors engaged in these dramas (1995:190).

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<sup>6</sup> Keffe is forced to some recognition of the overlap between persistence and resistance when he describes the adoption of resistance fighters as heroes. Incredibly Keffe equates a choice between Bennelong and Pemulwy as identity figures with a choice between persistence and resistance.

<sup>7</sup> James Scott and the subaltern studies movement for instance.

The remedy Ortner prescribes is ethnography. By elucidating the cultural and political specificities, complexities, divisions and contradictions of the subordinate group, she argues, a better understanding of resistance (and of domination) can be achieved. An adequate analysis would need to address the interplay of authenticity and hegemony - and here she cites with approval the work of Willis, in exploring British working class sub-culture - and it must carry the analysis to the question of the relationship of the individual or person to domination, bringing the concepts of consciousness, subjectivity, intentionality and identity into the equation (1995:183). Clearly the picture would be further enhanced by turning the same ethnographic eye on the powers that be.

I take heart from Ortner that the ethnographic method can serve as an incisive tool for understanding the current dynamics of power, oppression and liberatory struggle as it effects and is enacted by Aboriginal people. I see it as my task to explore the structural, ideological and experiential elements of *being oppressed*, as well as of resisting oppression but to show also that these do not make up the sum total of Aboriginal people's lives. I hope to bring to life a world which, for all its embeddedness in other systems of meaning, its hegemonic compromises and its cultural *bricolage*, has a life and momentum of its own.

## Methodology

My work, then, is grounded in the ethnographic method. A twelve month period of intensive fieldwork was conducted at the south coast community of Jerrinja from July 1994 to July 1995. Aside from a short initial sojourn as the guest of a Jerrinja family at Currarong, the majority of my research was conducted while resident on the mission. Since my departure I have maintained contact with the community, although regrettably my return visits have been far too short and far too far in between. A series of additional supplementary interviews was conducted at Jerrinja and Huskisson this year.

I should briefly note that in the task of writing up I have, at times, deliberately turned to the narrative form to counteract the monopolising - and I would argue, life draining propensities - of the analytic approach. There is, I contend, a level of detail, nuance

and complexity that can be achieved evocatively through narrative, which it is impossible to convey through analytic frames. From this type of detail, I further contend, emerges a kind of understanding which can never be picked from the bare bones of intellectual discourse. It is my intention in presenting these freestanding narrative vignettes, then, to give the reader a feel for the texture, rhythms and character of Jerrinja life and to create a space for the reader's own intuitive and analytic readings. To offset the analytical imperative to distil out common elements, I have purposely sought to illustrate the diverse, complex and sometimes contradictory alternative ways and means in which contemporary Koori subjectivities are constructed and lived.

Although I hope to be faithful to the encounter, I make no claims to presenting an objective slice of reality; these are passages decisively shaped by my subjective perspective and intents, reflecting as much on myself as the other – but no more or less so than in the analytic. In some respects these narratives serve to satisfy Devereux's ethnographic injunction that '*What happens within the observer must be made known ... if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood*' (cited Behar 1996:6, italics in the original), nevertheless, I remain conscious that the authorial presences and absences here, as always, remain far from innocent.

## Conclusion

This thesis is concerned to show how it is that in spite of a long, involved and continuing history of interrelationship and interchange with the people, technologies, institutions and ideologies of mainstream Australia, Jerrinja continues - both by objective measures and self-conscious identification - to represent and operate substantially as a world apart. It is intended, furthermore, to demonstrate that Koories should not be seen simply as passive victims of racist exclusion but active agents in maintaining separation and distinction between themselves and the dominant order.

In staking claims for the 'authenticity' of Aboriginality in settled Australia there has been a marked tendency amongst anthropologists and other analysts to pursue one or other of two extremes. At one end, are those passionately dedicated to proving the persistence of indigenous cultural forms; at the other, are those who reject the

possibility of autochthonous continuity and declare the only valid expression of authentic Aboriginality in the post-colonial context can be the shared struggle against oppression. The latter position is strongly advocated by Cowlshaw:

I would argue that it is useful to see the experience of loss, of oppression, of marginalization and contempt as more significant, challenging and contentious sources of Aboriginal alterity than are the traditions which have been the subject of the body of anthropological research (2004:195).

In this thesis, I will embrace both positions, arguing that in symbolic and in substantive ways, contemporary Koori lives and identities extend from, and draw upon, both traditions and are forged at the intersection of the two.

Cowlshaw couples her rejection of claims for ongoing indigenous cultural autonomy with the incisive argument, that the black/white divide is based not on cultural difference but on 'identification, loyalty, status and political participation' (2004:32). Here the importance of processes of boundary construction and maintenance is implied. In this respect Cowlshaw's argument concurs with that of Barth. However, as previously outlined, there is a second face to Barth's theory that posits that the upkeep of the divide protects a backstage for the maintenance and expression of cultural difference. I contend that in the focus on the oppositional construction of Aboriginality, characteristic of the interface, Cowlshaw and other resistance writers neglect the private, comforting and demanding space of an everyday taken-for-granted world where memory and knowledge, everyday practice and emotional disposition mark out a space of belonging which is distinct from, and which does not derive its meaning solely from, its relations with the mainstream. The integrity of this lifeworld, and of the mainstream world from which it is set apart, are dependent on the patrol of the racial boundary, in which, I will contend, shame plays a critical role.

## Chapter Outline

In the next chapter I locate Jerrinja and provide a basic overview of its environmental setting, layout and sociological characteristics. As well as showing its boundedness in space, I also seek to demonstrate how its distinction from the mainstream is clearly revealed by demographic and socio-economic statistical indicators. Chapter Three is the first of two chapters providing a historical background to the contemporary Jerrinja community. This one, focused on early settlement, explores how individual personalities and a particular development history affected the process of colonisation. I will look at how the operation of a dual economy enabled a degree of cultural autonomy to be maintained. The second history chapter, Chapter Four, examines the increasing peripheralisation and exclusion of Aboriginal people from mainstream society, and the establishment and operation of the Roseby Park Aboriginal reserve in an era of increasing State intervention. Chapter Five turns to the internal dynamics of the contemporary Jerrinja, conceptualising it in terms of a kin-based moral community. Chapter Six examines other everyday practices and beliefs, which set Jerrinja people – both consciously and unconsciously - apart from their neighbours and demonstrate significant continuities with their indigenous heritage. Chapter Seven focuses on the place of shame in maintaining boundaries between Jerrinja and the mainstream. Chapter Eight looks at the politicisation of identity and culture, while Chapter Nine draws conclusions about the importance and processes of boundary making at Jerrinja.



### Vignette: RUBY'S VERANDAH

Ruby's verandah must rate as one of the loveliest spots on the mission. I suppose it's not really a verandah – though it once might have been – for it is completely enclosed. The room faces north and, with windows on three sides, the sun shines in all day. In the chilliest weather, that verandah is a haven of warmth. The room is recently painted apricot. There is a vinyl lounge, an old single bed, which serves as another place to sit or rest, and the small table and chair, where Mal studies the form guide and listens to the races on the clock radio. A pile of newspapers is stacked on the floor. But the really special thing about that verandah is the view. From there you look out onto the Crookhaven, in its sparkling splendour. You can watch the movement of the tide, sometimes dragging slowly in, others rushing out to the ocean. You can see the comings and goings of commercial fishing vessels, the rowing boats with keen amateurs and on the far bank, dark and bush, Comerong Island. Beyond that, in the background, is Coolangatta Mountain, home of the hairy man and the place where Ruby was born.

The tranquility of the scene is interrupted by the arrival of a drunken Scoop, who raps at the window. Opening the door, Mal is confronted by a slur of greeting. Sometimes they, the drinkers, get sentimental with Mal, reminiscing about the old days, about drinking with the old fellas, but today the small talk rounds promptly to the matter of a loan of \$5. Mal extracts the money furtively from his wallet, not wanting Scoop to spy the crisp twenties he has recently scored on a good bet. Scoop takes the cash and disappears. *The trouble is today they can get a quid anywhere... See a bloke comes in and bites me for money and I give it to him. He knows he can come back and get it again, 'cause he knows that he pays me.* Dole day is never too far away.

Ruby Cooper (nee Longbottom) was born at Coolangatta in 1924. Both her grandfathers worked for the pastoralist, Berry, on his estate; they were white men. *The Aborigine came into it, Ruby's brother, John, told me, when George Longbottom married a half caste.* Ruby's other grandmother was part-Maori. Ruby remembers that her family

moved to the mission when she was four years old. They didn't come directly there, she says, but stayed somewhere else, for a while, while their houses were brought down.

*Old slab huts they were, that were put back together on the mission. I remember there were four rooms. There was one big room with a great big fireplace and a little hall. There wasn't a bathroom; we had the sanitary pans outside. There used to be a big waterhole at Orient Point. All the Koories on the mission used to carry water to their houses to wash. Our whole family lived together, three brothers and three sisters. My grandfather and grandmother were with us too.*

Today there's just Ruby, her eldest son Mal, youngest daughter Beverly and Blaize, Beverly's infant son, living at home. With the exception of a granddaughter next door, the rest of the family – and there are lots of them since Ruby had eight children – now live in town.

*They used to tell us stories about the hairy man. And I believed it. He used to come down from Coolangatta Mountain. If there were any kids playing on Comerong, the hairy man used to come and pick them up and put them in a chaff bag and take you back up Coolangatta Mountain, chop you up and eat you.* She laughs, a soft chuckle. *I told my kids too.* Ruby maintains that she doesn't believe in hairy men anymore, but I suspect she still harbours serious doubts. After all, she says, they reckon they've seen footprints. When we went to Comerong for a picnic, she soon put an end to suggestions that she mind her grandson in the car, while Beverly and I went for pippies.

It was a struggle for Ruby and her husband bringing up a big family on the mission but, says Ruby, her parents had it even tougher. We lived through the Depression. *Gee it was hard! You couldn't get anything. I'm not ashamed to say it, we lived on pears. Boiled in ashes. You wouldn't believe how hard it was. No-one could get any work.*

*My happiest memories? Walking through the bush with my mother. We had some wonderful times. Gathering boronias. We'd walk way up Curley's Bay. We'd get tea*



*tree brooms. We used to make brooms. Get a handle, put them all around the end, tie them up with a piece of rope... They were good days. We were happy to do with what we had. We had no money. Now I think there's too much greed.*

Nowadays you can buy just about anything you need, and good cuts of meat, not just mutton flaps and other scraps that nobody else wants. But sometimes, if the butcher has them I, and she feels up to it, Ruby stews up a pot of rabbit soup, for old times sake and because it's a favourite of Mal's.

I'm sure, along the way, I've had enough clues to put it together, but I still can't quite put my finger on Mal's age. I guess he must be in his late fifties. Mal's hat is his trademark. I don't mean just the one hat – for he has a small selection – but the fact that you never see him without one. One thing you won't forget about Mal, is the way he laughs. It starts with a wicked smile, his eyebrows raise, nostrils flare, and he looks at you with a sideways glance, to see if you've got the joke. Like the time me and Beverly, after putting on his bets for him, secretly backed his horse and when he found out he complained that, with two extra riders, no wonder it had come home slow.

Diagnosed some years back as a diabetic, Mal is very mindful of his health. His doctor reckons he's his best patient. Mal takes careful account of his diet and each morning checks his blood sugar levels, with the conscientiousness of a laboratory technician. Mal has become, in a sense, his own scientific study. Once in a while, he'll eat an icecream or sweet cream-cake or a bucket of greasy chips, but my suspicion is that it has lost its appeal as an indulgence and become more of interest as an experiment to gauge the effect on his sugar count.

Nearly every afternoon, Mal likes to take a long walk. He always takes the same route, walks along the river-front to the headland and comes back along the bush track. He takes his time, mostly because he's in no hurry to get home and also because age is beginning to creep into things. Often times, the lads drinking by the river see Mal and call him over to Club Med, their makeshift shack, to say hello. *Sometimes*, says Mal,

*they put it on me to share a drink. Now that makes a fella mad. Like, I'm not flash, like, but... They know I don't drink. He used to, and heavily. It'd taken great willpower but Mal had given it up, just like that, overnight. I had to to survive. Lot of the blokes I used to hang around with, well, they gone now.*

Mal says he can't understand young people today. In his day there was the colour ban to contend with. Koories weren't allowed to go beyond the third form, so at fifteen he was forced to leave and started his first job, at the cordial factory. He rode his bicycle early each morning, all the way over to Bomaderry and, after work, rode all the way back again. Later, he tried to enlist in the army. He presented himself at the recruitment office, filled out forms, even had the medical, and was supposed to go for an interview in Sydney. But in Nowra, the recruitment officer discouraged him from pursuing his application, telling him, his chances of success were minimal. *'If I were you', he said, 'I wouldn't bother.'* When Mal sought an explanation, the man said knowingly, *'Well for example, son, what colour are you?' I sort'a give up hope then.*

Ruby brought out a bundle of photographs, mostly those old-fashioned, Post-it-Pak sized monochromes; square and framed in white. Discoloured by age, the edges a little tattered, Ruby handed them to me gently, one by one. Here were children, standing beside a small weathered house, here a group of women, sisters perhaps (I can't recall)... *That's Popeye*, she said, pointing to the face of a handsome Aboriginal man, *my dad. He had blue eyes.*

*Pop-eye worked very hard, as a handyman*, says John, Ruby's brother. *Sometimes he used to say he was better off when he got rations and a summer and winter suit. Rain, hail or shine he used to row the boat across to Greenwell Point for groceries and mail. The kids used to pinch fruit from his orchard, black mulberries, sweet strawberries. Beverly was the main culprit. He didn't admit it. He use to accuse another family. (It was war, his wife piped in). He used to say, continued John, When I die I'm going to come back as a black snake and I'm going to lie at the bottom of the peach tree and bite*



*you kids*. For years after he had died, there were reports of a snake under that peach tree and it had been seen slithering up to and under Pop Eye's shed.

At times, looking out onto the river, Ruby's thoughts seemed to drift faraway. Sometimes they turned to her son Kevin, who died young, after an illness. He had dark skin and wavy hair. He took after my grandmother. He traveled with a boxing tent, they used to call him the big Maori. Story has it, one day Ruby was there, at a fight, and she'd lain into a man with her handbag because he'd done something wrong by her son. This didn't fit in too well with the picture I had formed of Ruby, as a rather frail, timid mouse.

After the army episode, Mal got the wanderlust and took off traveling, all over the state. He had a hand at all sorts of jobs, spent years on potato farms, picked peas and beans, planted massive forests of pine, travelled around geeing for his brother, in the famous Roy Bell's Boxing Tent. Today, he says, the young Koories have got all the opportunities before them, school, university, training, good jobs. *If a man had had those opportunities in my day you never know what might have happened. I could'a been a millionaire!* The tone is not really light-hearted, but shot through with a melancholic sense of unrealised potential; of a life whose horizons have been heavily circumscribed, because his skin was one shade and not another. Mal recalls his early brushes with the law. If you were a Koorie in Nowra in my time, you had to be careful, you could get pinched. I done ten days cold for nothing. They'd say, *'Are you gonna come drunk? Or I'll hit you with language?'* I said, *'Drunk'll do me. A bloke could be walking down the street with a bottle. Here am I, seventeen years old not drinking. They class you as the same.'* People will tell you things haven't changed so very much from then.

For the year I was on the mission, I was a fairly regular guest for dinner at the Cooper's place. Beverly and I would take turns to cook. I arrived one day to find her extremely agitated. Her husband had been back in court and the presiding judge had made snide remarks about the fact he was married to a black girl. Things were difficult and when a personal tragedy struck, Beverly decided she wanted to make a new life for herself and applied for Housing Commission accommodation... in Murwillumbah.

When Mal came to visit me at home, we went together to Braidwood. At one time, his father, Stan had lived there with his parents. Stan's father came from further out west originally, but he had moved to Braidwood after work. With no where else to stay, the family had taken up residence in the old jailhouse. Mal wanted to have a look. He'd been there once before and had tried, numerous times, to describe the place to me. My earlier investigations had uncovered a lock-up behind the old court-house, but ruled that out along with a number of other possibilities. When we arrived, Mal felt himself disoriented; we couldn't find it.

I thought of old Bob, who lived behind the Albion Hotel. A retired public servant and professional photographer, Bob has an interest in the local history and likes to take shots of old buildings. We knocked on his door. Bob emerged, snowy beard, pink faced, his knees giving way under the tremendous weight of his body. He wasn't sure about the old jailhouse, he said, but he made it his mission to find out. *A splendid afternoon to indulge in a touch of historical sleuth work*, he said, or at least, could have said, as he bundled Mal into his car. The two of them drove off; I had other duties to attend to.

No doubt their tour took in a great many superfluous sights but two hours later, when they had returned, it had been established that the old jailhouse in question had once stood in Policeman's Paddock, by the new motel, but that it had been demolished some years back. It made Mal sad to know it had gone. *Me and Bob went all over the place*, he said later, *And talk! Couldn't get a word in*. But it wasn't just that Bob didn't stop talking that really struck Mal. It was the way those words, *all them dainty words*, just kept flowing. It's a control of the English language of which I've noticed many Koories feel the lack. In another situation Mal said to me, *You know, they talk all them words; I get mixed up*.

Ruby first met her husband, Stan, when he lived at Bilong, the old Aboriginal camp that used to be a little way up the creek running into Jervis Bay beside Huskisson. On his mother's side he was a Carpenter, and there were lots of them – Carpenters – living there.



Ruby remembers she used to visit the place when she was a school girl, around ten years old. A number of families from Bilong were to shift to the mission from there, later on. At one time, long after they were married, Stan made a down-payment on a block of land of their own, at Orient Point. With great effort he had cleared the land and planted it out with vegetables. Mal recalls, *We tried to make a bit of a go of it, planted beans, potatoes. That's going back, that'd be about forty three years ago, counting on my age. We, ah, did alright outa beans and that whatsaname. But we could not keep the payments up...Like, ah, paying the government. We had the two acres there but they ended up taking it back off us.*

Having lost his land, it seems Stan turned to fishing for his livelihood. His was one of a number of crews from Roseby Park, who hauled fish from the beaches at Jervis Bay, for sale at the Nowra markets. Mal looks back on that period with fondness. *My old man used to say, we'll go out and camp. Geez I was healthy. Strong as a lion...We used to live off the sea. Only what you used to have was flour, spuds, onions, salt. That's all you wanted, and water. And you had everything there you wanted. Mutton fish, I mean the abalones, and oysters and conks and a few crays if we could get 'em and pippies and fish, anything like that. I used to love it. I didn't like coming home from out there. But we had to come home; we run out of flour and stuff. Used to come home here, couple a' days, we'd be gone again.*

There is, I've noted, a certain ambivalence in a lot of Jerrinja residents attitudes toward the mission. A fond sentimentality for home is quite often mixed through with a sense of confinement – not surprising given its history – and a kind of relief, when able to put a little distance between the place and themselves. In the early days, people had often retreated into the bush to avoid management surveillance. Drinking and gambling, activities frowned on by the authorities, were cloistered in the adjoining reserve lands and this tradition, certainly as far as drinking is concerned, has continued to this day. That's how it is that the lad's shack came to be erected on public reserve land. One day, while I was there, the Council moved its trucks in and demolished Club Med. They loaded out old lounge chairs and other bits of furniture, that had been scavenged to make the place

comfortable, and then crashed down the structure and took it away. On the local news and in the papers, it was reported that six truck loads of rubbish had been removed. When Mal heard he shook his head, *Look what they're doing to our people.*

Mal doesn't have a lot of respect or time for white people generally. He'll say hello to them alright, but he's crooked on them, for all that they've done to his people. *Take the fisheries, for instance. Today there is a legal limit of ten on the taking of abalone. Mal is angry. Now going down and getting ten, that's an insult. Its an insult to me, anyhow. In the old days you'd go down and get twenty mutton fish, abalone. Well there was a family, there was ten of us, you had to get twenty. Well that'd be only two each. Like you never made a glutton of yourself. But you know, people never used to worry about it. They'd come up to me and say, what's them? But now they big money, in't they. And you just don't know who's looking over your shoulder. I don't want to get meself in all the trouble just to... just for the sake of the white man see, he wants to catch you. Like before, I never used to be frightened. I knew I was doing the right thing. But now a man's frightened even to go out his front door. Like he's going to steal something. He's going for oysters or abs or something like that, he's stealing. Things what go back to two hundred years, all along the coast here. They only gotta go along the coastline here, and no matter where you dig up, you'll dig up all these oyster shells or mussels or pippies or anything.*

Sitting on the verandah, Ruby and I talked about the Protection Days. You used to get some good managers, she said, and some were mongrels. Which leads to another one of those surprising and infamous stories about Ruby. About how one day, one of the managers Ridgeway, called the police onto her. Ruby put up a good struggle, hitting the policeman on the head, before they finally bundled her off in the paddywagon. In local parlance, policemen are known as jungarr or octopus, after their steadfast grip and perhaps their many tentacles or as gunjiwal, a reference to ghost or sometimes, demon.

In the evenings, Mal often retired to his room early. Sometimes he quietly hatched plans. If something come of them, he reasoned, people would find out soon enough. A man



doesn't have to tell everyone what he's doing... Like his new car. Everyone got a surprise when one day, a white Ford sedan turned up in the driveway. Having a car, of course, was not without its problems. There was, first of all, the fact that Mal didn't actually have a license anymore; he'd have to get one, but in the meantime, he said, he quite enjoyed being driven about. Then there was the matter of what everyone else around the mission was saying. You know what Koories are like – *Why's he got a car? It's just will power, you know. Anyone can buy a car. I don't smoke or drink, it's just logical.* One had to be careful too, in case anyone tried to steal his petrol at night. Last, but not least was the fact that everyone – brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews – wanted to use it. That's what led to the big blue between Mal and his mother. When Mal went to visit Beverley and Blaize at Murwillumbah, he told the family he was leaving the car in the garage in town. In actual fact he had lent it to a young gubbah friend of his. By accident, Ruby found out, and she was ropeable. *What lend the car to her and not to your own family? Don't think I'm going anywhere in it anymore!*

Ruby's still not beyond issuing the occasional threat to do someone physical damage if they deserve it, but she is frail now and weary. Her skin is pallid and her body wracked with aches and pains. Sometimes, she says, she'd like to move away from the mission, closer to the rest of her family. The mission isn't what it used to be, she says. She hardly sees anyone these days, except maybe when she runs into them at the bus stop. She remembers how everyone used to sit outside, talk, celebrate together. *But now, it's like a ghost town. I'd like to move away really, she says, but I can't give up the place, it wouldn't be right.* Not after her husband had fought so hard for these new houses. A lot of people moved off the mission. We stood our ground. We might have lost the place otherwise. No, she said, it just wouldn't be right.

Right at the end of my stay at Jerrinja, Mal and I took a walk around Lake Wollumboola, it's one of my fondest memories of my time there. It was an early winter's day, but it was sunny and warm, with the lightest of breezes. Thin wisps of cloud wafted high in the sky. We strolled along the water's edgy, climbed sand hills, pushed our way through bushy stands, retracing the paths that he and Kenny Carpenter used to take when they

came rabbit trapping. Their trapping expeditions had, it seems, been carried out methodically. Between trips they would bury equipment and basic food supplies, so they could travel light. Travelling in one direction, they'd gather firewood into a heap at each of three base camps, ready to be lit as soon as they returned. They'd lay out the traps, resetting them a couple of times a night and, at the end, bury their gear again and go home empty handed, except for the rabbits.

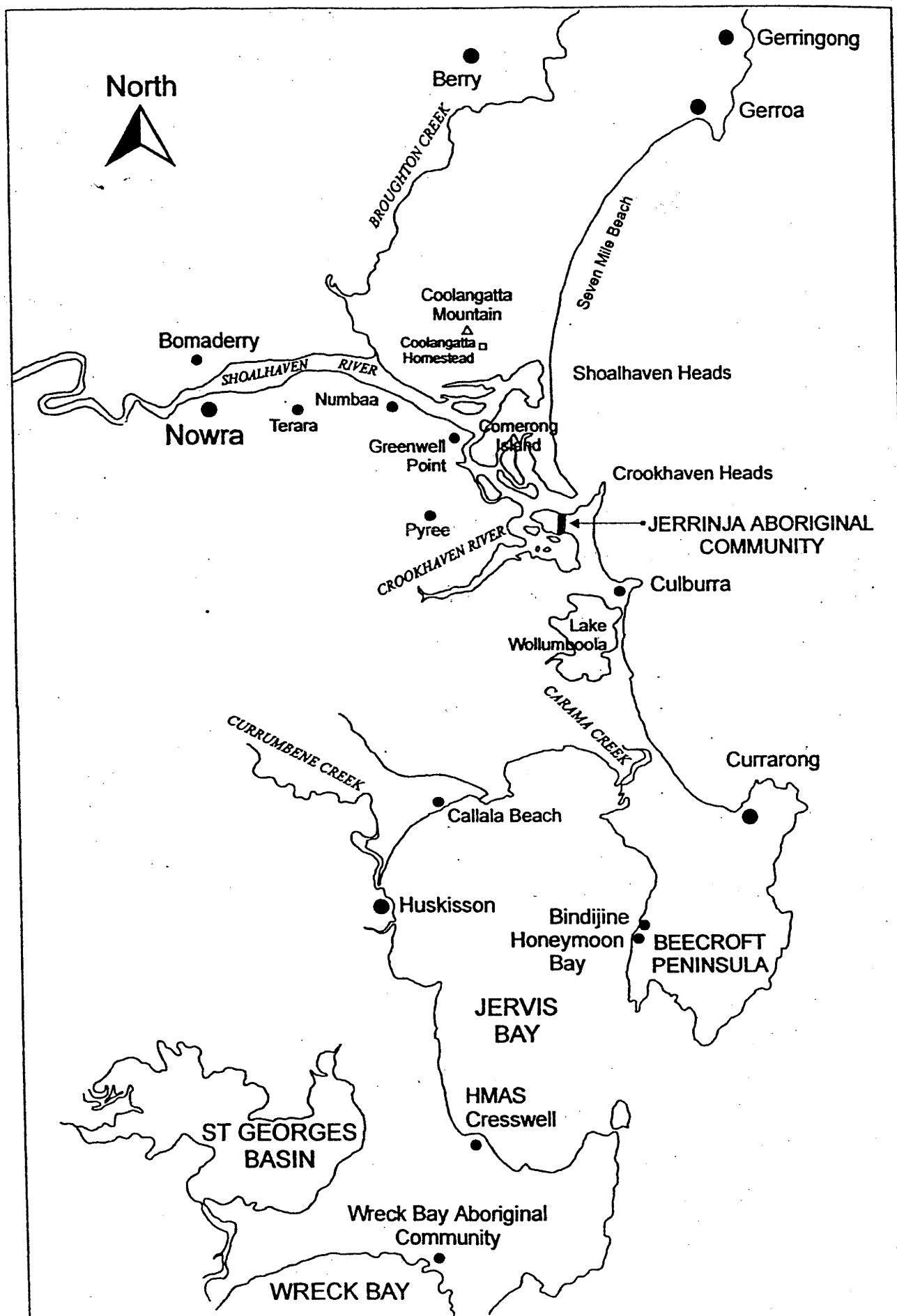
As we walked along, Mal scanned the ground for tell-tale signs of rabbit, the way he'd once been taught by Jimmy Dixon. Here's where he done his water last night. *He'll be back. They always come back to the same spot.* Mal smoothed the sand and drew diagrams of rabbit traps; he demonstrated how they were anchored with sticks. At lunchtime we barbequed our meat directly on the coals, like they used to. When Mal and I get together, our mouths still water over the juicy, charred flavour of those chops. In the days when he and Kenny came out, which was not so very long ago, they used to sit by the campfire and talk and tell stories. Kenny christened Mal, Tom Pepper because he told that many liars – tall stories might be closer to the way I'd put it. *They were good times alright,* Mal reminisced, *you won't see days like that again.* Kenny never used to like going home. *There's nothing home at the mission for us,* he'd say, a refrain that Mal repeats often. Carefully observing the landscape around us, Mal commented wistfully on how much it had changed. This here used to be covered in water, he told me, as we wandered homeward. *And, giving me one of his sideways looks, he raised his eyebrows. Look at a man, he's walking on water now.*

## CHAPTER TWO

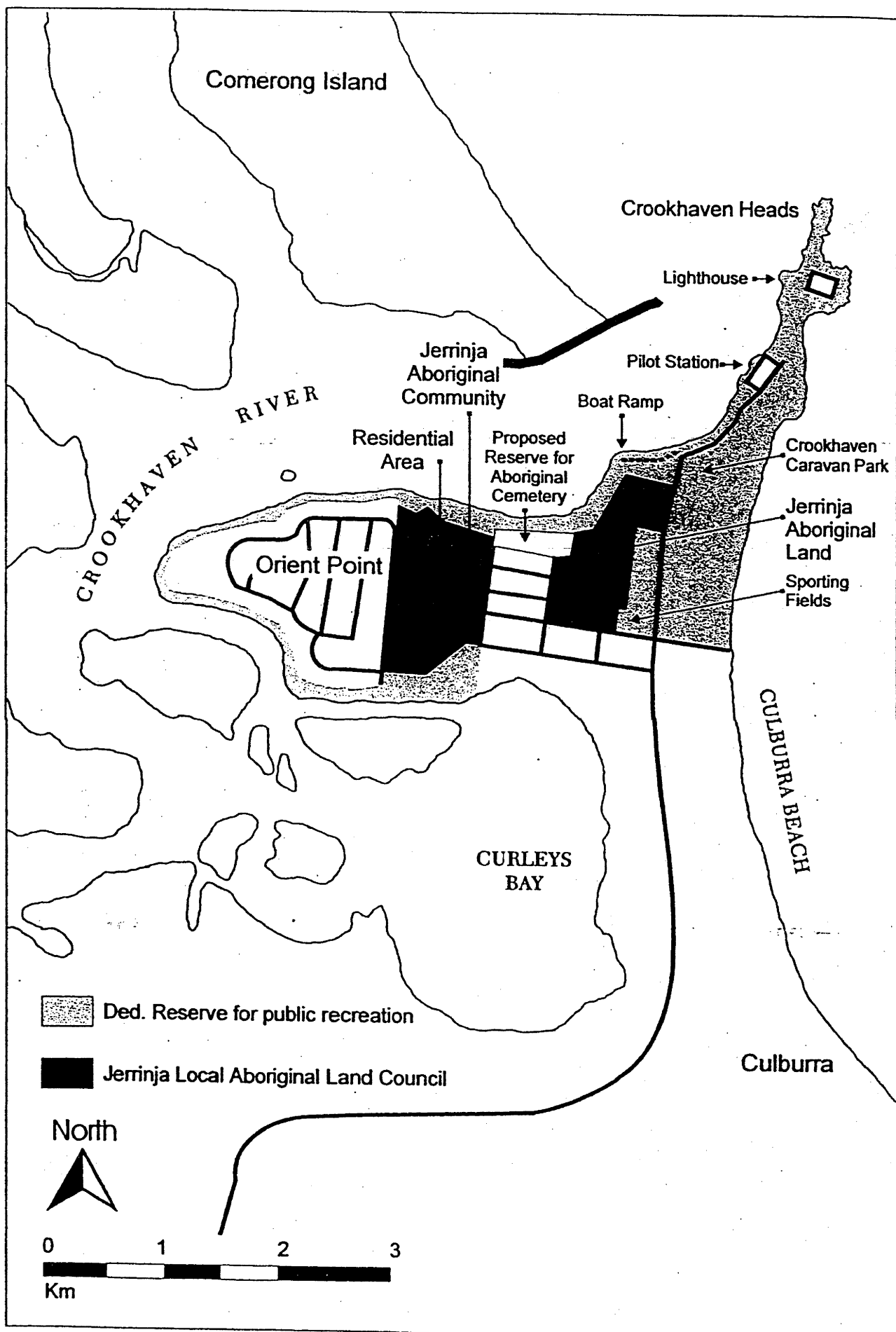
### COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT

Some twenty kilometres, by road, from Nowra on the New South Wales coast, between the seaside resort of Culburra and Orient Point, on the Crookhaven River, lies the Jerrinja Aboriginal Community, formerly the Roseby Park Aboriginal Reserve. The reserve was officially established in 1900, when a number of Aboriginal families were removed from the Berry estate at Shoalhaven, although it is clear there were already Aboriginal families resident in the area at the time. Between 1906 and 1966, Roseby Park operated as a managed institution. With the exception of officials, white access to the reserve was strictly prohibited. Although some of the residents went out to work on surrounding properties, for many years 'the mission' itself remained cloistered amongst bush and sporadic farm land, far removed from the to and fro of mainstream life. Strict controls on their broader movement did not prevent the residents enjoying relative free reign over the surrounding bushlands and waterfront, from which they harvested wild foods to supplement their ration supplies, and where leisure hours were whiled away beyond the purview of the managers.

In 1960, the building of a road right through the middle of the reserve marked the beginning of the end of the mission's isolation. The surrounding lands were progressively carved into new subdivisions, blocks sold off and homes constructed. At first only small, spartan, sparse and sporadically occupied holiday homes, the buildings became increasingly substantial over the years, the occupation more permanent and the coverage more dense. Once begun, the build-up of the area continued unrelentingly, until the situation today, where Jerrinja finds itself completely enveloped by white suburbia, hemmed in between 1950s fibro holiday cottages, non-descript brick homes and the pretentious mansions, which signal the area's increasing urban consolidation.



MAP 1: Regional Map of Shoalhaven and Jervis Bay



MAP 2: Jerrinja and context

## Jerrinja today

Rusty signs, bearing the Aboriginal flag, and perforated by bullet holes, mark the boundaries of the Jerrinja community, which are otherwise spelt out, as you enter, by the marked deterioration in road quality<sup>1</sup>. The living area is narrowly buffered from the surrounding white neighbourhood by grassy strips, overgrown with weeds and littered by old car bodies. Although there are no physical barriers to entry and the streets are contiguous with public roads, outsiders are reluctant to venture onto Jerrinja land. Rumours circulate amongst the whites of cars being stoned and people assaulted. A further deterrent exists in the form of hordes of large, territorially-minded dogs, who terrorise pedestrians (Jerrinja included) and can stop a car dead in its tracks.

Amongst many whites, the presence of the mission is resented, as a burden on otherwise prime real estate and as a perceived source of delinquency which spills out to sully public spaces and endanger their streets and homes. Such attitudes represent an ironic twist, and one might also say an obstinate denial, of the reality that the major invasion of space and bodily encroachment in black/white relations has taken, and continues to take, place in the opposite direction.

Despite, or because of their fears, and due to the sense of closure it projects, the 'mission' attracts intense interest from outsiders, so that, even in the space which is considered most their own, the Jerrinja feel themselves under constant surveillance from watchful eyes. Notwithstanding the powerful effects of surveillance, there are, as I will take up later, more insidious ways in which hegemonic forces penetrate the inside domain than the prying eyes of nosey neighbours; a fact of which Jerrinja people are not unaware. Anthropologists may be counted as one. Nevertheless, at this point, I want to look at the 'mission', as it is commonly experienced, as a place where Jerrinja people can conduct their affairs in relative isolation.

In 1995, at the time when my major fieldwork was undertaken, the population of Jerrinja, including 11 non-indigenous residents, stood at just over one hundred and

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<sup>1</sup> Such was the state of things when I first arrived at the mission, since that time both signs and streets

seventy people. It should be noted that Jerrinja, an indigenous revival, is not a name or identity that everyone who lives on 'the mission' accepts, nor, some would argue, is it one to which everyone who lives there is entitled to claim. The issue will be explored in further detail later, for now it provides a convenient label which will be used broadly to specify both the place and all its residents. Jerrinja is also commonly known by its members as 'the mission' or 'mish', although it was never a religious institution, and sometimes as the 'middle east'.

The land on which they live belongs to the Jerrinja, or at least to the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council which is not, as will become clear, the same thing. Jerrinja land covers an area of 105 hectares, comprising an original 22 hectares signed over to the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council under the provisions of the NSW Land Rights Act and a further 83 discontiguous hectares of bushland granted to the community by the NSW government, following a dispute with the Shoalhaven City Council (Fox u.d.: 31.36). The original reserve, which includes the current living area, straddles Orient Point and is flanked on two sides by reaches of the Crookhaven River (see map 2). This land is now carved in two by the road, previously mentioned, which leads to the suburban precinct of Orient Point. Once a focus of community life, the southern side of the property, fronting the backwater of Curley's Bay, is now simply a grassy paddock, little used. Jerrinja living is concentrated on the northern half, overlooking the final stretch of the Crookhaven before it meets the sea.

From Jerrinja, multiple tracks descend 'down the front', to the river foreshore. Up river, the Crookhaven's original flow is swelled by the convergence of the Shoalhaven, the artefact of early settlers' canal building efforts. Across the river, brought into being by the same pioneering stroke, is Comerong, an island of sizeable proportions, long farmed but still bearing thick stands of rainforest. Various other small islets stud the river. Flowing between Comerong and Jerrinja, the water of the river is estaurine, subject to tidal influence and lightly fringed by mangrove vegetation and oyster encrusted rocks. Low tide exposes broad muddied flats and once prolific, now sparser populations of edible shellfish. The sandy shoreline leads seaward, past the boat ramp - favoured haunt of casual fishermen and pelicans - to

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have been upgraded.



Crookhaven Head, which, anchored by a narrow isthmus, juts boldly out into the Pacific. Surrounding rock platforms support a rich maritime habitat, while the ocean, pounding the rocky shore, has carved tiny coves in places between solid outcrops. On the far side, a long sandy beach stretches southward toward Jervis Bay.

The 'mission' itself is laid out in two linked cul-de-sacs: one street fronting the river and a second running parallel. Twenty seven homes, the majority dating from a 1970s housing project, are arranged in suburban fashion about the deeply potholed streets, while the old wooden manager's house, standing a little removed, has also recently been reclaimed as a residence. A distinction in residents' minds between the 'top' and 'bottom' of the mission seems to hold little relation to the current street layout, continuing, it seems, to locate its bearings in the old wooden schoolhouse - one time office and ongoing multifunction meeting place - atop the hill. Two other communal buildings may be found on the mission, the new medical centre, hosting a weekly baby's clinic and periodic sessions by a local doctor, and a cavernous shed, the defunct remainder of some past development project. A funded gardening scheme, involving a professional horticulturalist and employing one resident part-time, had helped to establish, and for a time maintain, vegetable gardens in a handful of yards, as well as planting trees around the mission which now lend their shade, fruit, beauty and added privacy to at least some of the Jerrinja homes.

In contrast to the withdrawal of white social life behind closed doors, the streets, gardens and verandahs of 'the mission' are (though decreasingly so) social and public spaces where people sit, gather, gossip and play. Few houses are fully fenced and a good many fences lie in varying states of disrepair, making for easy passage. On an ideological level, Jerrinja residents maintain that there is a freedom on the mission, where anyone can go into anyone else's home, but there are increasing complaints that, in that sense, 'it's not like it used to be'.

Beyond the bounds of the mission, Jerrinja residents continue to claim the river frontage<sup>2</sup> and bushy reserve adjoining it, as a place primarily of their own. This Aboriginal appropriation of 'public' space is strongly resented and contested by other

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<sup>2</sup> The shore portion of the reserve was revoked for public use sometime after WW2.



local residents and by Council, who complain about noise, fires, rubbish and broken bottles. The community maintains a cemetery on the adjoining reserve, which after a long ban against its use, was reopened at the unauthorised initiative of the community.

## Demographics

Before any other sources of distinction are considered, an examination of the demographics of Jerrinja will serve clearly to demarcate it as a community apart<sup>3</sup>. By any number of indicators Jerrinja represents an impoverished sector of the Australian society, sharing, in exaggerated form, the general demographic profile and statistical indicators of disadvantage of the indigenous populace nationwide.

One measure, which clearly distinguishes Jerrinja from the general neighbourhood in which it is ensconced, is the density of household occupation. According to 2001 census figures for the 'Indigenous Location' of Culburra-Orient Point, a statistical unit constituted in the main by the residents of Jerrinja<sup>4</sup>, the mean household size amongst the indigenous population was 4.2 compared to 2.4 among the non-indigenous population. Based on my own figures, the average density of occupation on the mission itself, in 1995, was six persons per household. This placed it significantly higher than the 1996 census based average of 3.3 persons for indigenous households across New South Wales - 3.7 nationally - and well over double that of the comparable non-indigenous household density of 2.7. On the ground, the actual spread of residents across the predominantly three bedroom homes of Jerrinja varied between single occupiers and a household of nineteen, sometimes twenty, which spilled out from an overcrowded house into backyard shacks and caravan. There were four houses with ten occupants or more at that time.

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<sup>3</sup> For the most part figures used will be those relevant to the period in which my fieldwork was conducted.

<sup>4</sup> That the Jerrinja population comprised the bulk of the indigenous population in the Orient Point - Culburra location at the time of my fieldwork is indicated by comparison of the ABS figure of 200 indigenous persons in the 'location'; at the 1996 census, 148 persons in the 'collection district', which more carefully isolates Jerrinja geographically (but for which detailed statistical data is not obtainable), and my own 1995 estimates for the Jerrinja population of just over 170. Anecdotal evidence would similarly suggest that there were not many indigenous households beyond the mission in the area at the time. Moreover, at least one, and possibly two of these households was comprised at the time of ex-Jerrinja residents.

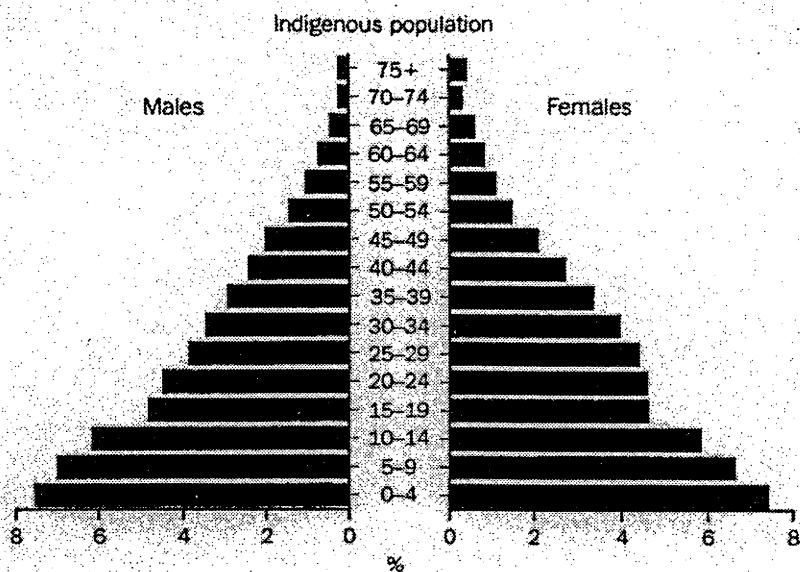
Household composition at Jerrinja is generally complex, few households representing standard nuclear family units<sup>5</sup>. At least half the households had three generations present and during the time of my fieldwork, there were only five houses out of twenty eight that did not contain children under fifteen years of age. In 1995, on my own estimates, approximately 40% of the Jerrinja population were aged 15 years or under, with 15% under five. The figures concurred with 1996 ABS data for the indigenous population of the Orient Point - Culburra 'indigenous location', where 39% are recorded as 15 years or under and 14.5% in the 0-4 age bracket. By comparison, in the 1996 census only 21.1% of the overall NSW population was aged 15 years or under.

The age profile of the population at Jerrinja reflects the national indigenous demographic profile, contrasting strongly with the non-indigenous national demographic and even more markedly with the local demographic profile. In the 2001 census, the median age for indigenous persons in the Culburra-Orient Point district was 18, while the non-indigenous median for the same area was 46. Figures 1 and 2, graphing the age distributions by sex of indigenous and total NSW populations, bring the contrasts between the age structures of the indigenous and broader Australian populace into sharp relief. Both demonstrate strong congruence with national demographic profiles of the same type. The trend is reflected in pronounced form at Jerrinja, figure 3 representing the age profile for the 'indigenous location' of Orient Point – Culburra in 1996.

In explaining the relative youth of the Jerrinja population one factor to take into account is a high rate of birth. The average annual growth rate for the indigenous population in NSW over the five year period 1991 to 1996 was 2.5%, two and a half times that of the comparable non-indigenous population. Across their childbearing years, indigenous women, generally are likely to have more children than their non-indigenous counterparts, and at Jerrinja this is markedly so. ABS statistics based on the 1996 census show that whilst in the overall NSW population only 5% of females

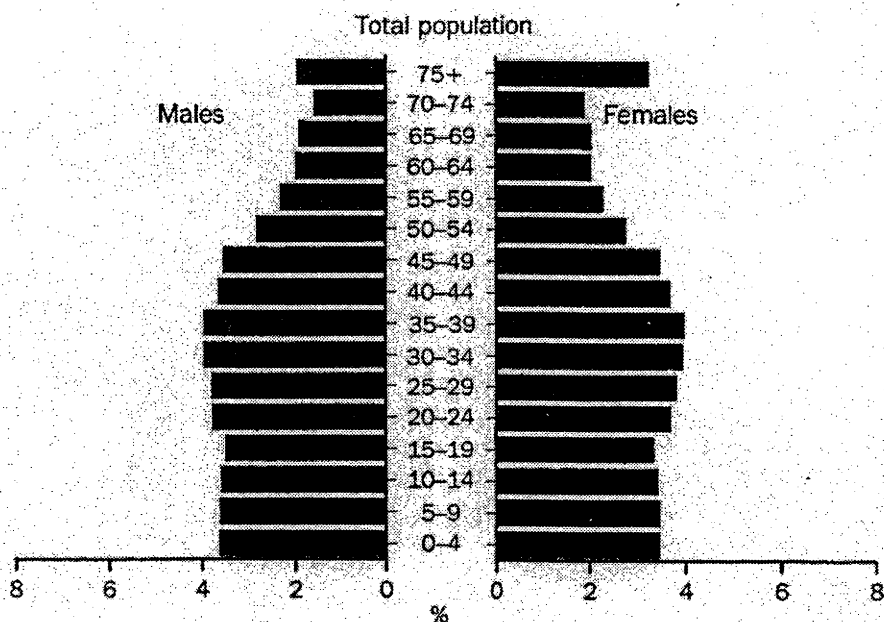
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<sup>5</sup> The issue of household composition will be revisited in a later section.



Source: *Experimental Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population, 30 June 1991 to 30 June 1996* (Cat. no. 3230.0).

FIGURE 1: Age distribution of indigenous population - 30 June 1996

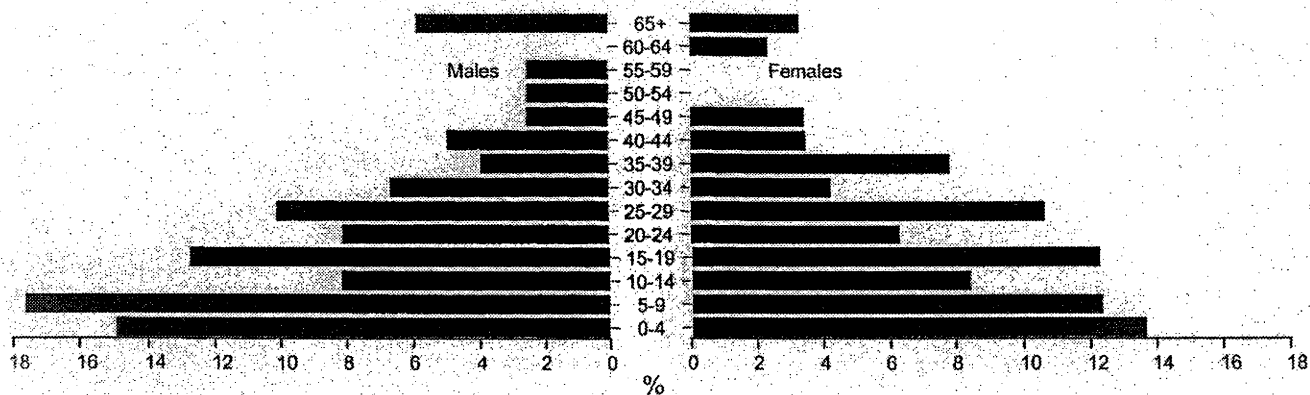


Source: *Australian Demographic Statistics, September Quarter 1997* (Cat. no. 3101.0).

FIGURE 2: Age distribution of total population - 30 June 1996

FIGURE 3: Age distribution of indigenous population

### AGE DISTRIBUTION OF INDIGENOUS POPULATION - CULBURRA



Source: Based on the 1996 census data.

37%. This fact, coupled with strong representation of women in, and moving into, the early childbearing years, as well as a continuing pattern of early first pregnancies, means that the birth rate at Jerrinja is likely to accelerate.

The converse of the high concentration in the early age brackets is the relative depletion in older age groups. Amongst the NSW population overall, 12.6% of the population<sup>6</sup> was aged 65 and over in 1996, while only 2.5% of the indigenous population could be counted in this age group. In the Orient Point - Culburra district in 1996, 5.8% of indigenous males and 3.9% of indigenous females were in the over 65 category. In the same period, 32.7% of the general NSW male population and 35.0% of the general NSW female population was aged 45 and over, whilst the comparable figures for indigenous persons were 12.9% for males and 13.9% for females. The corresponding figures in the Orient Point - Culburra district produced figures showing 14.5% of indigenous males and only 10.7% of indigenous females were aged 45 years and over. Jerrinja is not a closed community and movement off the mission (which occurs particularly amongst those families on the political periphery), must have some bearing on the demographic profile. If anything, however, this outward movement, largely of younger people moving off to establish new families, should serve to mitigate rather than accentuate the relative imbalance between young and old.

The abovementioned figures are indicative of the other major factor explaining the relative youth of the Jerrinja population, early mortality. The figures for Aboriginal life expectancy and mortality are frequently cited but they can not fail to shock and distress. Amongst the indigenous population across the country, life expectancies continue to fall some twenty years short of those of the non-indigenous populace (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2003:6). Based on 1998 figures<sup>7</sup>, the first official estimate of the death rate amongst indigenous people in New South Wales suggested the rate was, in age adjusted terms, 42% higher

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<sup>6</sup> Of those who answered census questions on age.

<sup>7</sup> Until 1998, indigenous status had not been sufficiently well recorded on NSW death records to allow for statistical analysis. Preliminary NSW Health analysis suggests that the 1998 figures continue to under-record indigenous mortality, these figures representing only between 47-84% (sic) of total expected deaths for the relevant population (Chief Health Officer 2000).

than amongst non-indigenous people (Report of the Chief Health Officer 2000)<sup>8</sup>. Amongst the NSW indigenous population in that year, deaths in the under 25 age bracket were, at 15%, more than five times higher than deaths in the same age bracket amongst non-indigenous persons. 22% of indigenous deaths occurred amongst those aged 25-44, compared to 5% in the non-indigenous population. Meanwhile, only 27% of indigenous deaths occurred amongst those aged over 65, while the comparable non-indigenous rate was 79% people (Report of the Chief Health Officer 2000). The cited report draws no specific attention to the differences pertaining between indigenous and non-indigenous people in the middle age grouping, but the Australian Bureau of Statistic's quasi-national picture for the period 1995-1997, based on combined data for Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory<sup>9</sup>, show that death rates in the 35-54 year age group were 6-8 times higher in the indigenous population (ABS 1999:131) than in the Australian population overall.

Differences in the causes of death, and of ill-health more generally, between the two populations are also significant. Aboriginal people are more likely to suffer from and succumb to diabetes, renal failure, respiratory disease and cardiovascular diseases (coronary disease and strokes) than other Australians. Despite limitations in the identification of indigeneity on hospital records, NSW Health suggests that in the period 1993/1994 – 1999/2000, age-adjusted separation rates for a primary diagnosis of diabetes mellitus were six times higher amongst indigenous patients than that for non-indigenous patients (Chief Health Officer 2002). ABS figures for WA/SA/NT in the period 1995-97 showed that death rates from circulatory diseases were three times higher amongst indigenous people than their non-indigenous counterparts, while death rates from respiratory disease were five times higher amongst indigenous males and six times higher amongst females (Chief Health Officer 2000).

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<sup>8</sup> No update of this figure is included in the 2002 Annual Report. Serious difficulties are encountered in reporting on Aboriginal mortality rates because of under-identification of Aboriginality in death records.

<sup>9</sup> Reliable figures for the remaining states and territories were not available. The authors of the report observe that while these statistics may not be directly representative of the national situation the patterns of death by age and cause of deaths for indigenous people in any state more closely resemble the W.A/S.A/N.T statistics than state-based non-indigenous statistics. Furthermore, they observe that an expectation that remote indigenous health is worse than urban health is belied by the fact that the East Metropolitan Health Authority (Perth) had the second highest age-standardised death rates for indigenous people from 1989 - 1993 (ABS 1999 4704.0:133), although there is no comment on the extent to which such figures may have been affected by evacuations from remote areas to major hospitals.

In her recent work, Cowlshaw has railed against the citing of ‘statistics of immiseration’ suggesting that these ‘non-indigenous products’ are somehow distant from individual Murri experience and unhelpfully ‘invite indigenous people’s subjective assent to their own status as victims’ (2004:204):

But accounts of massacres are even more distant from individual Murri experience than are statistical accounts of black disadvantage, although they are taken as evidence of a universally experienced distress (2004:204).

I hardly find these statistics removed from the individual experience of people at Jerrinja, where daily lives constantly speak the pain that they represent. Furthermore, if it is meant to suggest that the situation of Aborigines in settled Australia is not comparable to national figures, evidence would suggest otherwise<sup>10</sup>. At Jerrinja, high incidences of stroke, diabetes, renal failure, alcohol related degenerative conditions and accidents, make for debilitated lives filled with suffering, heavy burdens of care, premature deaths, sorrowful losses and ruptured families. When individuals, reeling after the death of one close family member, find themselves not long after mourning someone else too young to die, and, then, before long, again in attendance at the funeral of a loved one, it is difficult to bear. One woman shell-shocked in her distress over a series of deaths affecting her family, and finding no space of reprieve to recover from these multiple burdens of grief, lamented piteously that there were just ‘too many’ (deaths). Not isolated points of distress, these deaths sometimes mark the end (and beginning) points in strings of pain at Jerrinja, which variously thread together histories of childhood institutionalisation, domestic violence, sexual abuse, alcoholism, psychological stress, self-destructive and suicidal impulses, familiar episodes in the ongoing sagas of trans-generational trauma documented by Atkinson (2002).

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<sup>10</sup> See footnote 9 for instance.

## Housing conditions and employment

Standards of living at Jerrinja, in many cases, fall short of those found generally amongst the local populace. About 40% of Jerrinja homes were, in 1994/95, without telephones, washing machines and other ordinary conveniences, although all had at least one television, and some could boast two or more, with cable TV a new addition. Only about half of the households at Jerrinja possessed a vehicle in 1995, although a few had more than one. In 1994, the majority of homes were affected by housing maintenance problems and utility breakdown, with some in serious state of dilapidation. Missing windows, damage to internal walls, doors and flooring, leaky plumbing and unviable water pressure, dysfunctional toilets, dangerous electrical problems, broken hot water services, fixtures and cooking ranges, unsound fireplaces and chimneys (resulting in one instance in a house fire) were amongst the problems enumerated; some residents dependent on the facilities of their relatives' homes for basic services.

After considerable wrangling and public lobbying, an ATSIC grant was released late in 1994, for a progressive program of repairs and renovation. Structural and service problems were rectified, stoves and hot water cylinders replaced, as necessary, and slow combustion heaters were installed in most homes. Houses were revamped with coats of varnish, fresh paint, new fixtures, tiling and laminates, each household selecting their own colour scheme and patterns. Complemented in some cases by private purchase of new furnishings and appliances, by 1996, a substantial improvement in the living environment for residents had been made. However, casual observations on return visits since that time indicate that housing conditions are once more in a state of decline.

Few Jerrinja residents hold regular mainstream employment. Amongst the working age population at Jerrinja, during the time of my fieldwork, unemployment levels were informally calculated at no less than 70%.<sup>11</sup> In 1994/5 there were four men and two women from Jerrinja in full-time employment. One was occupied as a tradesman, the

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<sup>11</sup> These figures do not make allowances for the persons who may not be medically fit for employment and are not comparable to official unemployment rates which are based on those regularly seeking employment.



remainder held designated Aboriginal positions in government – in national park/conservation services, the police force and the local primary school. In the same period, five middle to mature aged men and one teenager were self-employed in the fishing industry on a sporadic seasonal basis, whilst others harvested small quantities of seafood for sale once in a while. A figure of 70% of men without regular employment counts the fishermen as employed. Without their inclusion the rate would be nearer 80%. A figure in excess of 80%, without any paid work also attained amongst women of working age who were not caring for children under five. Consultancy work associated with consents for development projects presents itself on occasion, but, in contrast to recent pipeline work, was of little significance in 1994/95. From time to time, short term employment opportunities arise in community work and training schemes, such as the gardening project which produced one part-time position. A 1994 Koori development scheme in the oystering industry recruited several young men, but the project ended after a short time with no ongoing benefits. Some of these programs may possibly have been funded under the CDEP program but it was not, as it has since become, a prominent source of community employment.

For most Jerrinja residents social security benefits are the main or sole source of income. At March 1995 the standard old age pension stood at \$163 per week, while the married rate was \$136, this tallies closely with the median individual weekly income recorded for indigenous persons in the Orient Point-Culburra indigenous location in 1996 of \$161 for men and \$186 for women. Notably these figures were significantly lower than the comparable NSW and national indigenous weekly income medians, and well below the corresponding figures for the overall NSW population. The indigenous weekly income median for local indigenous men was less than 40% of the \$420 median found amongst the non-indigenous population statewide, although there was less contrast to be drawn between indigenous and non-indigenous women the latter median calculated at \$228. The male indigenous/non-indigenous contrasts are, however, less starkly drawn when a comparison is made between income medians for indigenous and non-indigenous men in *the same local district*; the median weekly income for the latter standing at \$227. Between indigenous and non-indigenous women there was no difference at all, with both at \$186. The low non-indigenous medians in the Orient Point - Culburra district generally may be attributed in large

measure to a high proportion of retirees resident in the area. Unemployment rates are also above average at 19.4% amongst men and 10.2% among women.

### **Mainstream participation**

The receipt of social security benefits is one thread in a dense web of Jerrinja entanglements with, and dependencies upon, the institutions of mainstream Australian society. In education, health care, the supply of goods and services, banking, municipal services, leisure and sport Jerrinja residents, in the main, rely upon and participate in the same institutions as their non-indigenous neighbours. There are a number of Aboriginal specific organisations located in Nowra including Aboriginal medical services and the South Coast Aboriginal Legal Service.

Public bus services transport children from the community to school daily during term. Primary school students attend the local Culburra Public Primary School; high school students must travel into Nowra where they attend either Shoalhaven High or Nowra Public High School. The primary school employs an Aboriginal teacher's aide, currently from Jerrinja and operates an after-school homework centre two afternoons per week. The high school also has an Aboriginal Liaison Officer. A formal playgroup for toddlers and infants was established during 1995, with some mothers and their children gathering in the old school house on a weekly basis.

During the time of my fieldwork, people usually attended the local doctors' surgeries in Culburra when in need of medical care. Soon after my departure, however, a separate Aboriginal medical centre was built on the mission, with one of the same local doctors operating a clinic there one morning a week. More serious complaints are treated by specialists in town, at the Nowra Base Hospital, or where special expertise and facilities are called for at the larger hospitals of Wollongong and Sydney. Some Aboriginal outreach services are operated from health organisations in Nowra, although the services are much criticised by Jerrinja residents.

Their relative isolation from the major service centre of Nowra, and even from the small village of Culburra, coupled with a bus service which runs fairly infrequently and only within daylight hours, makes shopping, access to services and recreational

excursions difficult. The situation was improved when a community bus was acquired, under the auspices of a program for youth, and a regular shopping run to Nowra instigated<sup>12</sup>. Basic supplies were available from the nearby Orient Point butcher (now closed) and neighbouring corner store, the latter allowing people, including children, to book up on family accounts. Prices there, however, are inflated and according to Jerrinja, as agents over postal and banking services, the proprietors of the store sometimes exercised unauthorised control over their social security payments to recoup outstanding debts.

Jerrinja residents commonly take up membership in local social clubs including the Ex-Servicemen's Club in Nowra and the local Culburra Bowling Club. There, like other local residents, they gather for a drink at the bar, play poker and other gaming machines, take their chances for prizes of cash, meat trays or the like on badge draw evenings, listen to music or dance at the discotheque, and, in the case of one resident, take part in competition bowls. A shuttle service picks up and returns passengers from the Culburra Club some evenings, while making it to town for dancing on the weekends usually presents serious logistical difficulties. After a night out, many find some place to stay with family in Nowra, hitching their way home next day. Card playing is a popular past-time on the mission but other forms of gambling which take money out of the community - horse racing, gaming machines, lotto and similar games - are increasingly popular. Bingo, hosted weekly by the Nowra Police Boys and Citizens Club, attracts a regular Koori crowd, including a substantial contingent from Jerrinja. Habitual players juggle multiple booklets of tickets. Keen players, with access to transport, travel further afield to other bingo venues perhaps playing two even three times a week.

When I was there, the community fielded men and women's touch football teams, and at least one family were taking their children to participate in local athletic and tennis training and competitions. By far, however, their participation in the district rugby league competition represents the community's biggest involvement in local sporting life.

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<sup>12</sup> I understand this service is no longer available.

Jerrinja usually enters a team in the local football competition, although sometimes – to the great detriment of the social life of the community - lack of organisation and finances means they may go, a year or two, unrepresented. If transport were available, few would want to miss the action when the Crookie Magpies play. Eager fans vie for spots in crowded vehicles, while some must wait a home-based game, rowing across the river to reach the oval at Greenwell Point. The supporters gather in excitement; spirits enlivened, for some, by having a charge. The Crookie team is reputed for its rough play and a strong bias against them in the refereeing is taken as a given. From the sidelines the ref and opposition players are targeted for insistent and racially based abuse and accusations of unfair. Here is an opportunity to play with underlying racist currents and the Jerrinja players are roundly encouraged by their supporters to ‘drill the cunts’. Swearing finds free reign and solidarity is palpable. From the non-indigenous quarter disdainful looks are turned upon them. After the game celebrations or commiserations might continue at the Empire or Greenwell Point Hotel or back home on the mission. At the supermarket, where supplies are collected on the way home, the same looks of disapproval are proffered. At the checkout, white ladies exchange looks amongst themselves and comment on there being ‘lots of them’ outside.

But if passions are inflamed when they play against the *gubbahs*, the animosity is even greater when Crookhaven takes on Wreck Bay, a neighbouring local Aboriginal community. A grand final between ‘Crookie’ and Wreck Bay is a major social event for the whole local Aboriginal community and many come to take part, some more intent on catching up with kith and kin than watching the game. Some Jerrinja residents, with connections on both sides, find themselves in a difficult spot. Their Wreck relatives make snide remarks about Jerrinja, ‘lowest of the low’. Going there they say is like taking a trip to ‘hell’. Jerrinja meanwhile - or some of them - accuse the Wreck community - or most of them – of being Johnny-Come-lately intruders upon their land, lapping up inordinate and grossly disproportionate benefits in resourcing and employment opportunities just

because, as residents of the Jervis Bay National Park, they happen to fall under Commonwealth rather than State jurisdiction.

### **Jerrinja – the history and politics of the name**

To this point I have exercised a certain liberty and unselfconsciousness with the use of the name Jerrinja over which it would be wise to hold pause, for there is much in the word and more than one contention surrounding it. There are some on the mission, particularly amongst the older generation, for whom the place will never be anything other than Roseby Park. Reluctance to embrace the Jerrinja name stems in the first place from an historical and sentimental attachment to the earlier name, from doubts about the authenticity of the word Jerrinja, from a hesitation to embrace the political agenda with which its adoption was associated and from developments of late, which have led to increasing alienation from the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council.

The recent history of the name's use dates back to the 1967 establishment of the Jerringa (sic) Tribal Council. Encouraged by the political vision of the contemporary Aboriginal rights movement, the council was instigated, by Jack Campbell, to represent the interests of the community with a focus on Aboriginal culture and traditional leadership (Fox u.d.:31.5). In keeping with the motivating philosophy, the name Jerrinja was revived as a traditional reference to both the place and its people.

So far as some at Jerrinja are concerned the name is pure concoction, but its status as a name or word, of local origin finds trace in the historical record. It is not enumerated amongst the 'tribal' groupings listed in blanket returns for the area of the mid 1800s, but, in a 1900 word list, compiled from 'Buthring', a 'Coolangatta Aborigine', 'Jerrijer' is included as the original name for Greenwell Point, a place lying across the Crookhaven River from Orient Point (Campbell reproduced Organ 1990:469). The word also finds mention in Janet Mathews linguistic recordings of the 1960s. In the midst of an interview compiling vocabulary lists, Mathews receives the word Jerrinja in response to a question apparently aimed at eliciting the generic word for 'headland'. However, it is possible, that her Roseby Park informant, David Carpenter, may have been responding with the name of a particular headland in view.

From the time of its revival, membership of the 'Jerrinja tribe' became a strong focus of identity, for some residents of the mission. In the context of increasing pressure over land, the residents of Jerrinja sought to assert claims based on their unique relationship to country. In 1978, in the midst of a major dispute over land with the Shoalhaven Shire Council<sup>13</sup> and preempting the instigation of official NSW Land Rights Legislation, the Jerringa Tribal Council lodged a land claim over land at Orient Point and Crookhaven Heads. It began,

We, THE ABORIGINAL RESIDENTS OF ROSEBY PARK AND MEMBERS OF THE JERRINGA TRIBE, are the descendants of those Aboriginal people who have lived in the area now known as Roseby Park or Crookhaven Park since time immemorial... (Jerringa Tribal Council 1978, upper case highlighting in the original).

Meanwhile, as a result of its lobbying efforts the Jerringa Tribal Housing Company had been successful in securing a large Commonwealth allocation for new housing. The Jerringa Tribal Housing Company was established, overseeing the construction of twenty new homes on the Roseby Park Reserve. Memories of an official ceremony conducted by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in which ownership of the houses was pledged in posterity to their owners are strongly etched in the memory of Jerrinja residents.

NSW Land Rights legislation was passed in 1983. The Act established a three tiered structure of land councils, 118 Local Aboriginal Land Councils, 13 regional councils under the umbrella of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. The Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council was established under the provisions of the Act with boundaries extending from Gerringong to Lake Conjola. In accord with the Act membership was defined by residency within the prescribed council boundaries. Ownership of the old reserve land, and of the homes then vested in the Jerringa Tribal Housing Company, was transferred to the new Land Council. The Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council resubmitted their claims for Crown and reserve lands at

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<sup>13</sup> To be further discussed in Chapter Four.

Crookhaven Heads and ensuing negotiations resulted in the further grant of some 83 hectares (Fox u.d.:31.36).

For many years after its establishment there was little practical distinction between the constitution and interests of the Jerrinja community and the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council. The LALC office was housed in the old school house and although membership was officially defined in broader terms, in practice it was confined to Jerrinja residents and selected kin and countrymen. The election of office bearers and staff appointments were controlled by prominent individuals and families with strong numerical representation on the mission. The de facto congruency was seriously jarred, however, when in 1994 an administrator was appointed to oversee the operations of the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council. Amongst her briefs was a directive to open up membership to the broader, legally defined constituency of the LALC, which made no distinction between residents of local origin and recent arrivals to the area. She removed the headquarters from the mission, appointed a co-ordinator from Greenwell Point and instituted a system of council meetings alternating between public meeting places at Huskisson and Culburra. At this point it could be readily contemplated that majority membership and leadership of the JLALC could potentially be held by 'outsiders'. Threats from the administrator that Jerrinja residents could be evicted from their homes for non-payment of rent brought the reality of their alienation from control over land and asset management to the fore.

## **Conclusion**

Despite its encapsulation within mainstream Australian society, its multiple linkages and significant resemblances to other economically disadvantaged sections of the population, Jerrinja is set apart, in a sociological sense, by its historical and ongoing constitution as a separate settlement, by distinctive demographic features and by severe disadvantage on a range of socio-economic and health indicators. Moreover, one need not look far beneath the surface to pick up on the racial undercurrents which underlie the homogenous exteriority of mainstream life. The deeper grounds for difference, as well as the explanation for their social positioning, must be sought within the particular moral, social and material economies that operate within the

community and which find their logic in a distinctly different past, one distinguished by its indigeneity and by the painful experience of colonisation.

In the following chapter, I will return to the early days of colonisation and first settlement to show how boundaries were, with the backing of legal State force and by less formal means, first drawn and to examine, in more detail, the processes by which the physical, social and economic marginalisation of indigenous people of the Shoalhaven first came into effect.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE LINES ARE DRAWN: COLONISATION AND FIRST SETTLEMENT**

From the earliest days of colonial incursion, processes of boundary making were instituted by, and between, indigenous inhabitants and the newcomers, although in their abilities to define and maintain boundaries the two stood on substantially unequal footings. The steady march of colonial expansion southward from Sydney was, as this chapter will reveal, underwritten by violent State force and by the relative free reign settlers enjoyed in exercising punitive prerogatives. Yet as the details of the history will demonstrate, the legal dispossession of land did not automatically bring about physical and economic alienation of the indigenous inhabitants who were able, in varying degrees and over extended periods, to maintain significant spaces of social, cultural and economic independence.

This chapter will focus in particular on the lands and lives which came under the compass of the massive Berry estate which dominated white settlement in the Shoalhaven from its 1822 inception right through to the end of the nineteenth century. It will highlight complex layers of personal and economic interaction as well as the pointed maintenance of social and economic distinction. Records will show that the majority of Jerrinja residents today are descendants of persons who at one time or another were employed on the Berry estate, although some had clearly left their employ there prior to the enforced removal of the Aboriginal workers and their families to Roseby Park in 1900. Mindful that the Berry estate formed one but not the only element in the history of Jerrinja, the chapter will also briefly canvas the persistence of fringe camps about the Shoalhaven and at Currumbene, near Jervis Bay.

## Boundary making and allegories of colonisation

In January 1788, a party of three European boats reconnoitring the harbour at Port Jackson, were observed by a group of Aborigines who stood onshore at Manly Cove. Twenty Aboriginal men waded, unarmed and confident, into the water to greet the newcomers, receiving gifts from them. Captain Phillip, who led the expedition, would remark positively upon the indigenes' curiosity, but he noted that it proved 'troublesome' later as the party made their preparations for dinner on the beach. Drawing a circle in the sand about his group, Phillip made signals to the Aborigines, now carrying their spears, shields and ...(swords), that they were not to come within it. '...(T)here was little difficulty', he wrote in a despatch to Lord Sydney, 'in making them understand...and they then sat down very quiet' (cited Willey 1979:49).

The Europeans read the event as an allegory for the reception of their broader colonial project. Captain Watkin Tench observed that in the early days of the settlement,

'...We had flattered ourselves, from Governor Phillip's first reception among them, that such a connection might be established as would tend to the interest of both parties. It seems, that on that occasion, they not only received our people with great cordiality, but so far acknowledged their authority as to submit, that a boundary, during their first interview, might be drawn on the sand, which they attempted not to infringe, and appeared to be satisfied with.'  
(Tench 1789:40).

It was a selective vision; there were other, and earlier, episodes of first contact which would have provided less reassuring models.<sup>1</sup>

If the incident instilled colonists with confidence that the indigenous inhabitants of the new country would accede to their advent without question, the Aborigines, for their

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip's first encounter with the Aborigines was, in fact, some days earlier when he had sailed into Botany Bay observing forty Aborigines gathered on shore 'shouting and making many uncouth signs and gestures'. The sight had lead him to land his boats on the opposite side of the bay. Captain Cook's initial attempted landing at Botany Bay was met with opposition, 'They called to us very loudly in a harsh sounding language...shaking their lances and menacing; in all appearance resolved to dispute our landing to the utmost...' (cited Willey 1979:27) and demonstrated courageous determination to resist despite musket shots fired.

part, could have had little understanding of what that advent entailed. The Aborigines were bound, as were the Europeans, to make something of the event according to the cultural concepts, historical understandings and interests which gave meaning to their world at that time. In 1845, Mahroot, labelled the last survivor of the Botany Bay tribe, recalled how his old people had viewed the first arrival of white men, 'They thought they was the devil when they landed first, they did not know what to make of them. When they saw them going up the masts they thought they was opossums.' (cited Willey 1979:52). That these newcomers would come, marking out boundaries in ever-widening circles, to exclude Aboriginal people from their own lands and from (what would become) main society, would then have been, one might conjecture, in the realm of the unthinkable. That the process would be painless, or complete, was in the realm of fantasy.

Perhaps the response, so commonly reported, of Aborigines initially welcoming the white newcomers as relatives returned from the dead, arose in part from sheer incredulity that strangers could, in their unceremonious and unapologetic entry onto another's country, so unashamedly flaunt *law* and protocol. On the east coast, at least, territorial boundaries were well defined and rigorously upheld. Movement across tribal boundaries was governed by stringent protocols with unauthorised entry constituting a serious offence liable to traditional forms of punishment. But if trespass was a recognisable offence in the indigenous polity, colonial invasion was without precedent. The metaphysical nature of classical attachments to country, fusing flesh, spirit, country and Dreaming (Stanner 1984:159), made seizure of foreign territory or surrender of one's own as conscious objects of volition absurd.

### **Settlement of the Illawarra**

If their first encounters with white people left the indigenous people of Botany Bay and Sydney Harbour at some loss as to what to make of Europeans intents, some twenty five years later there was little left to the imagination. A clear pattern had been established of European appropriation of land, introduction of livestock or planted crops and the increasing exclusion of Aboriginal people from the means of their subsistence. The Government took no effective measures to restrain frontier

violence, adding their own force to the suppression of Aboriginal resistance on repeated occasions.<sup>2</sup>

Isolated incidents served briefly to hold back the tide of wholesale dispossession; in 1804, for instance, Governor King, negotiated an agreement with hostile Hawkesbury Aborigines that settlement would not precede beyond a certain point of the river (Milliss 1994:60), but such agreements did not last long in the face of growing European demands for land.

Charles Throsby was the first to bring cattle into the Illawarra district preceding, and probably spurring, its official opening to settlement. Inspired, as his nephew recounts it, by prevailing drought conditions in his home district near Berrima in 1815, Throsby had listened to the advice of Aboriginal acquaintances and set off, at their lead, to explore the country by the Five Islands (Throsby Smith 1863:48). Finding, as he had been told, ample grass and water, Throsby wasted no time in driving a herd of cattle down a Bulli mountain pass and erecting a stockman's hut in what is now Wollongong (Jervis 1842:75). The following year, Governor Macquarie issued instructions to the surveyor-general to survey and allot grants in the 'New District of Illawarra' (Jervis 1842:77).

European tradition has it that at an Illawarra corroboree at the turn of the eighteenth century Aborigines had worked themselves up into a warlike state over the invasion of white men into their domain; there were but few sawyers in the area then (Dollahan cited Organ 1990:496). The reaction to the arrival of white settlers *en masse*, after it was officially opened to settlement in 1815, seems to have paled in comparison. Charles Throsby Smith mentions some defiance on the part of Aborigines but proceeds to remark that they were 'never particularly hostile to the whites' (Throsby Smith 1863:48). There was good reason.

In 1816, only six months before official settlement commenced in the Illawarra, Governor Macquarie launched a severe military offensive against Aborigines in

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<sup>2</sup> In 1795, under Acting-Governor Paterson's orders, a squad of sixty soldiers was sent to the Windsor district to quell the Aborigines (Milliss 1994:46). Punitive expeditions were sent out by Governor King in 1804 (Milliss 1994:47) and instructions were issued for Aborigines to be driven away from

outlying districts of Sydney, including the Hawkesbury/Nepean, Appin and the Cowpastures. Writing in his private journal, Macquarie recorded his 'painful resolution' to 'inflict terrible and exemplary Punishments upon (the hostile Tribes) without further loss of time' arguing 'they might construe any further forbearance or lenity on the part of this Government into fear and cowardice' (Macquarie 1816b:70). There was little forbearance or lenity in the orders issued. Lieutenant Dawe was to head up one of the military detachments. His orders ran thus:

On your march from Liverpool to the Cow Pastures, you are to apprehend all the Natives you fall in with and make Prisoners of them. If they refuse to surrender, or make any show of resistance, or attempt to run away, you are to fire upon them, untill (sic) compelled to surrender.

Such Prisoners as you take are to be sent back to Liverpool to be confined there, and such adult male Natives as may be killed you are to cause to be hanged on trees in conspicuous parts of the Country they fall in.

You are to spare all Women and Children, and not kill any of them if you can possibly avoid it. If however any should be killed, they are to be interred where they may happen to fall. (Macquarie 1816a:69).

The campaign was not overly successful; one detachment failed to locate any Aborigines at all, one caught only a distant glimpse and another, inflicting no certain casualties, took one fourteen year old boy captive. A fourth detachment, ambushing an Aboriginal camp at night, was able to hang two trophies<sup>3</sup>, but only at the cost of the lives of a significant number of women, children and at least one old, infirm man, who were either shot in the moonlight or fell to their deaths 'rushing in despair over (a) precipice' (Wallis 1816:77). Such a campaign was not, however, without effect upon the Aborigines, striking fear and terror amongst them as intended.

The military forays were followed closely by the issue of a public proclamation placing a series of prohibitive orders against Aboriginal persons carrying arms,

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farms and settlements until ringleaders were surrendered (1994:774).

<sup>3</sup> The bodies of the outlawed Aborigines, Dunell and Kinnabygal, were hanged near Mr Broughton's

congregating in settled areas in numbers greater than six and conducting traditional fights at any locale. Further proclamations made outlaws of certain individuals and offered indemnity to those who delivered themselves up. The combined effect of these measures, Macquarie wrote to Earl Bathurst, was to induce the principal Chiefs of the various tribes to come forward, surrender their arms and sue for peace (Macquarie 1817:94).

Aborigines of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven were not necessarily sympathetic to the plight of their neighbours. Lieutenant Parker, whose expedition reached the Five Islands during the campaign, reported that the locals, after being reassured of their own safety, had declared to the troops that the Mountain Blacks were their enemies and offered every assistance in capturing or destroying them if they should emerge from their retreats. (Parker 1816:79). The display of military power and resolve demonstrated in the campaign must certainly, however, acted as a strong deterrent to any resistance on their own part. Its effects were far reaching. According to Hannibal Macarthur, reminiscing before the Legislative Council in 1842,

'after the affair of the Cowpastures' as he called it 'the dread of the military amongst the savages' was so great in County St Vincent<sup>4</sup> to the south that 'the mere marching' of troops for a few days was enough to 'check and prevent' any threat of defiance. (Milliss 1994:48)

The reception and strategies of response to permanent white settlement were, of course, more complex than a passive submission before might – a theme which will receive further attention in later pages – however, if hopes were being invested in Government promises that Aboriginal placidity would guarantee their safety, they would be disappointed.

In 1818 a case was brought before the Sydney Bench of Magistrates of possible murder of Aborigines at the Illawarra. It emerged that a party of white men, armed with muskets, cutlasses and bayonets fastened on long sticks, had set out in search of

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farm (Wallis cited Organ 1990:77).

a group of Aborigines, ostensibly to retrieve two guns given out on loan. The evidence surrounding the events that followed was obfuscatory. Certainly one boy had been shot with a slug in the forehead and at least one other had been fired at after he had hurled a spear. One witness testified that he had been informed by Bundle that 'the Natives (Men and Women) at the river ... were all killed', although the claim remained unsubstantiated. The two charged ringleaders were acquitted by the Bench with no more than an admonishment (Sydney Bench of Magistrates 1818:101-102). An outraged Governor Macquarie rebuked the judges arguing that it was evident that the posse had 'proceeded in hostile array, to attack most wantonly and unprovokedly, the poor unoffending Black Natives of Illawarra' and that at least one boy had been injured. He angrily ordered that one of the accused be rearrested so that he could deal with him as he saw fit, but if any further action was taken, it seems to have left no impression upon the public record (Macquarie 1818:103-104).

Four years later, on an Illawarra farm, the overseer shot an Aboriginal woman found in a cornfield carrying a netbag of cobs. She fell to the ground and was viciously attacked by the farm dogs, dying it would appear from the combination of her wounds. Nearby another landowner, wielding a cutlass, severed off the hand of an Aboriginal man similarly caught taking corn in his field. Though both men were brought to trial, neither was convicted (Organ 1990:116-130).

On the south coast, as in Sydney and other parts of the state, whites became known amongst the Aborigines as gubbahs. Usually interpreted to mean ghost, a story, from the Burraborang Valley, collected by M. Feld in 1900, may shed further light on its origins. The local people there, she wrote,

"believed that Guba lived among the mountains. He is supposed to be a wild, hairy man, with feet turned backwards, and to have a tail about thirty feet long, by which he would hang to the highest tree, in readiness to seize any of the Aborigines as they passed." (Feld 1900:lxxi)

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<sup>4</sup> Whose northern boundary is the Shoalhaven River.

An Aboriginal song, recorded by a settler of the Illawarra region from a local Aboriginal woman, apparently captures the fear which haunted,

The enemy is coming, make a hiding-place.

Look out, look out, hide very close.

They are coming, shouting, shouting.

Look out, look out, hide very close!

The kings' call to take cover.

We mustn't talk, we mustn't talk.

Look out, look out, hide very close! (Clara cited Brenchley 1982:46).

On the frontiers of white settlement settler violence reached such unspeakable depths of diabolism that all explanation seems futile. Yet there are certain elements solid enough. With astounding irresponsibility, the Government continued to issue grants over land for which it had secured no valid or effective hold. It turned a blind eye to mounting evidence of the bitter competition which necessarily ensued between the original landowners and the grantees who both sought, sometimes in desperation, to protect their lives and livelihoods. Illawarra farmers seem to have escaped physical assault, but the difficulties of the small farmer, striving to make a living, were real enough - 'In the space of one night', the Sydney Gazette reported, '100 or two of them (Aborigines) would take the liberty of clearing a field of every cob and thus ruin the hopes of a poor hard-working man's family' (1822:130) - but whether they entertained any interest in the farmers ruin<sup>5</sup> or were simply seeking their sustenance in a land increasingly devoid of traditional food sources, inevitably it was the Aborigines, legally denied all continuing rights to their own country, who were the greatest losers.

### **Berry and Wollstonecraft take up land in the Shoalhaven**

White settlement in the Illawarra district had not proceeded beyond Minnamurra when, in early 1822, Alexander Berry and his business partner, Wollstonecraft, made an extraordinary request to Governor Brisbane for the grant of 10,000 acres of land to the south, at the Shoalhaven River (Jervis 1941:32). Perhaps the Shoalhaven's

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<sup>5</sup> Stock and produce were sometimes destroyed in attempts to drive settlers away. In South East



agricultural promise spoke to Berry's ardent desire to establish a landed interest<sup>6</sup> but, for the firm of Berry and Wollstonecraft, the primary allure lay elsewhere. With business interests up until the time focused on mercantile trade - the export from the colony of timber, wool and sealskins and the import of a variety of products in demand in the Sydney settlement (Jervis 1941:28) - it was unquestionably the promise of rich reserves of cedar that tantalised their interest.

Both Berry and Wollstonecraft had already been officially promised grants of 2000 acres (Jervis 1941:30), the usual upper limit for free settlers with demonstrable capital reserves and Wollstonecraft had, by that time, already taken up 500 acres of his allocation at Crows Nest (Back to Shoalhaven Week Committee 1926:18).

Undaunted, the partners put it to the government that if given the greater grant they would commit themselves to maintaining 100 convicts. The cost, they estimated, would run to some 16,000 pounds over ten years (Jervis 1941:31)<sup>7</sup>.

The deal seems hardly to have been to the government's advantage - as it turns out, the authorities were never able to supply such a large number of convicts and the partners, recognising the value of this free source of labour, were later unwilling to surrender their right to demand the men, if they desired (Jervis 1941:34-35) - nevertheless, Brisbane gave his consent and, although it would take several years and considerable wrangling before the deeds were finally issued, a stretch of country extending from Broughton Creek, to Black Head and the Crooked River and down to the Shoalhaven (Thorp 1986:3.3) was given over to the two men, in free hold. In June of 1822, Berry sailed south to take possession to dire warnings from certain of his peers,

'I hear you are going to take a farm near Jervis Bay. Is it true?' I replied in the affirmative. 'Are you mad,' he retorted. 'The natives will eat you.' (Berry 1838:229).

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Queensland for example cattle were hamstrung and left to die.

<sup>6</sup> An interest born, Brenchley argues, of his family's origins as Scottish lowland tenant farmers.

<sup>7</sup> As it turns out, the partners were never required to fulfill their side of the bargain, it proving impossible for the authorities to supply such a large a number of convicts (Jervis 1941:34).

## The ill repute of the Jervis Bay Aborigines

The ill-repute of the Jervis Bay Aborigines seems to have been shaped in good measure from the prejudices of the Aboriginal populace about Sydney<sup>8</sup>, from confusion created by distance and from the propagandistic leanings of the contemporary press.

Neither Captain Cook, who sailed by that part of the coast in 1770, nor Lieutenant Bowen, who, sailing in 1791 was reputedly the first European to enter Jervis Bay, caught sight of the local Aborigines. In 1791, the *Matilda*, a whaling vessel, hauled in, coming close enough for those on board to observe that the many natives on shore were armed with spears but not near enough for any communication (Organ 1990:5-6).

In 1797 a bedraggled party of shipwreck survivors traipsing their way overland from Cape Howe toward Sydney apparently met with a small group of Aborigines just south of Jervis Bay<sup>9</sup>. The exhausted and hungry Europeans were shown hospitality, given fish and treated kindly. Shortly after taking their leave, however, they were confronted by a large and apparently hostile party '...a hundred more approached us, shouting and hallowing in a most hideous manner, at which we were all exceedingly alarmed. In a short time a few of them began throwing spears...' (Clarke 1797:15). Three of the group were wounded but were, it seems, suffered to make away.

Lieutenant Grant's account of his visit to Jervis Bay at the helm of the *Lady Nelson* in 1801, is the first definitive record of contact between Europeans and the Aborigines of Jervis Bay but its contents confirm that others had probably preceded him. Grant thought the Aborigines he met demonstrated a confidence which suggested familiarity

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<sup>8</sup> c.f. Collins report on Gome-boak, a warrior, from the south coast. The locals 'assured us, with horror in

their countenances, that Gome-boak was a cannibal' (Collins 1795:7). Of a visit to Sydney of Aborigines from south of Jervis Bay in 1804 the *Sydney Gazette* reported, 'they were of a hideous Aspect, wore frightful beards, & hitherto were estranged to every race but their own & if the report of their civilized countrymen be true, they still adhere to their primitive cannibal habits.' (*Sydney Gazette* 1804:Organ:26-27).

<sup>9</sup> The location is based on description of an extensive, deep bay (Clarke 1797:15).

with Europeans; and in their persistent cries of *blanket* and *woman*, he read evidence of an existing trade with passing sailors (Grant 1801:19-21, 1803:21-26).

The visit of the Lady Nelson was remarkably convivial. The Aborigines gathered, unarmed, in large numbers, friendly and curious. Grant and his survey party found them a 'harmless, inoffensive people, but much more robust than those about Sydney'. The classic novelties - mirror, bugle horn, watch, razor - were shown by Captain and crew to amuse and confound them; some men had their beards shaved. There were eager hands to assist as the crew hauled in the seine and the Aborigines were exceedingly pleased when offered a good share of the catch, 'danc(ing) and shout(ing) by turns around us' (Grant 1801:19). A scene, remarkably similar, would be repeated and depicted by the artist Louis Auguste de Sainson twenty five years later, when visiting French sailors danced and shared their catch provoking 'extravagant exhibitions of delight' from the local Aborigines (Dumont D'Urville 1826:144).

A spate of clashes between Aborigines and the crews of European vessels at Jervis Bay, resulting in casualties on both sides, is recorded in the early years of the nineteenth century. Reporting on the wounding of Mr Rushworth, the master of the *Fly* and the fatal spearing of his companion, Thomas Evans, a December 1805 Sydney Gazette article reviews a number of recent attacks said to have taken place at Port Jervis - the spearing of a sailor come ashore for water from the *Contest* and the wounding of Murrell, a whaler, whose party came under attack 'by multitudes' and who, it was reported, only escaped massacre 'with the utmost difficulty...(and) the loss of their whole stock of provisions.' (Sydney Gazette 1805b:30).

Such reports became the basis for later assertions that 'the natives of Jarvis's Bay have never been otherwise than inimical to us' and that 'small vessels have never touched there without experiencing their hostility in some degree or other.' (Sydney Gazette 1814:40). A closer reading of the original newspaper reports, however, reveals a degree of confusion about their locale<sup>10</sup>. Despite mention of Jervis Bay in Mr Murrell's case, the detail of the report places the action at Two-fold Bay, likewise the

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<sup>10</sup> A confusion compounded in Organ's anthology (see Organ 1990:29).

Contest affair seems to have taken place not at Jervis Bay but much further to the south at Two-fold Bay.

Deservedly or not, in alarmist tones, the media proliferated an image of Jervis Bay Aborigines as savage, malevolent and treacherous. Warnings were issued against 'the treachery and wanton inhumanity of the natives of that particular part, while there was grave talk of their 'faithlessness' and 'natural propensity to acts of cruelty (Sydney Gazette 1805*b*:30). Images were evoked of wounded white men making painful retreats to their boats 'leaving their inhuman assailants to express their joy of the barbarous event by re-echoed peals of mirth' (Sydney Gazette 1805*a*:29). Such depictions, serving both to justify and fuel European aggressions, may be seen as a corollary of the burgeoning violence against Aborigines about Sydney and surrounding districts.

The battle lines were not necessarily neatly drawn between black and white. Upper echelons of colonial society, influenced perhaps by notions of the noble savage and strenuously avoiding any recognition that territorial invasion played a role in Aboriginal animosity, were inclined, where there was trouble, to point the finger at the - invariably low class - whites involved. Governor King's comments on the fate of the seafarers is noteworthy not only because it suggests that there may have been provocation on the part of whites in situations of conflict but because it indicates the play of class differential in attitudes.

However much the white men may be justified on the principle of self-defence, yet I have cause to think the natives have suffered some wrong from the worthless characters who are passing and repassing different places on the coast, nor would they escape the punishment such conduct deserves if it could be proved (Governor King 1806:31).

The reputation of Jervis Bay Aborigines was not improved when, in 1814, they were implicated in an alleged conspiracy against white settlement in the Appin and Cowpastures district.

The natives of Jervis's Bay are reported in good authority to have coalesced with the mountain tribes...(they) have a declared determination, that when the Moon shall become as large as the Sun, they will commence a work of desolation, and kill all the whites before them (Sydney Gazette 1814:40)

The news sent the settlers into a panic. It was a period of escalating violence in the region, Aboriginal resolve apparently cemented by the cold blooded and gruesome murder of an Aboriginal woman and her children<sup>11</sup>.

### **Berry and Broughton<sup>12</sup>**

A new era in contact had commenced with the discovery of cedar at the Shoalhaven. The first load was shipped in 1812 and others quickly followed. Perhaps local Aboriginal reaction to this intrusion, particularly the felling of the giant and ancient trees, was aggressive but no doubt the reputation of the Aborigines of this part of the coast had already primed the cedar getters for offensive action. It can only be surmised what form of 'active vigilance' was deemed necessary by the crews to protect them from the natives 'who appeared to be numerous and athletic' (Sydney Gazette 1812:35); sawyers, however, were hardly known for their gentility. Jarvis' description of 'hard livers, hard workers, hard drinkers and hard swearers' (1940:51) lends a touch of glory, where the press of the time accused them of practicing 'vice of the most abominable kind...to the total annihilation of every correct principle' (Brenchley 1982:53); a reference that Brenchley interprets, in part, as telling of shameful treatment of Aborigines.

Whatever transpired, by 1814 the Government deemed it necessary to stem rising animosities between whites and Aborigines at the Shoalhaven by issuing an order

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<sup>11</sup> Throsby writes that 'the people were not content at shooting at them in the most treacherous manner in the dark, but actually cut the woman's arm off and stripped the scalp of her head over her eyes, and on going up to them and finding one of the children only wounded one of the fellows deliberately beat the infant's brains out with the butt end of his muskett...' (Throsby 1816:61).

<sup>12</sup> The following account which seeks to canvas Aboriginal responses to colonisation is drawn on the basis of limited available historical resources and gives some reign to the ethnographic imagination in interpretation. It should be read with these qualifications in mind.

banning timber vessels from entering the river (Brenchley 1982:53)<sup>13</sup>. The order was paid no heed and, in 1815, three cedar getters were attacked and killed, the body of one found with hands severed, 'a lock of hair' having been taken from the head (Sydney Gazette 1815:50)<sup>14</sup>.

If Berry was affected by such stories it might have been more for implicit news of cedar than because it evoked fear or any great sympathy for the sawyers on his part. Like Governor King, Berry may have been inclined to think they deserved it. Having enjoyed an education steeped in Scottish Enlightenment ideals and with some history of sympathy towards 'natives' of other lands (Bennett 2003:63), Berry sailed forth from Sydney with an attitude of benevolent tolerance,

'I however entertained no fears, and had no doubt would be able to conciliate them. I was even so chimerical as to be sanguine that I would be able to civilize them' (1838:229)

Berry's picture of himself as the intrepid pioneer descending unannounced amongst wild and remote savages, was not, however, without some guile. The Aborigines of the Shoalhaven were not altogether the untouched quantity that would imply; in fact, one of the so-called savages had called, note in hand, to see him at his George Street offices two months prior to his departure.

Dear Berry,

The bearer (Broughton) a native was born at the spot (Boon-ga-ree) where you propose to take your farm. He is well acquainted with every inch of that part of the country, speaks good English, and I think may be usefull (sic) to you. I have therefore told him if he will accompany you and explain to the natives there, that they are not to touch any thing you have &c., &c., &c., that you will

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<sup>13</sup> Brenchley says the order was designed to protect the Aborigines, although it may have been as much concerned with curtailing unauthorised harvest of timber.

<sup>14</sup> Refer to similar treatment of the body of the Aboriginal woman killed near Sydney - see note 11.

give him some tobacco, a pair of trousers, and he adds, he must have an old shirt.

Yours very truly

Chas. Throsby (1822:44-45).

Exactly how Broughton, or Toodwick as he was known among his own people (Organ 1990:443), came to meet Charles Throsby is not known<sup>15</sup>. Exploration of the fledgling white settlement by Aborigines of Jervis Bay and the Shoalhaven surely outstripped penetration of their own world. Aborigines of Jervis Bay and the Shoalhaven were not complete strangers to the new settlements, numbers travelling periodically northward, as they had traditionally done, to attend intertribal gatherings. Occasional instances noted in the historical records, such as an 1804 report noting the presence of four Aborigines from the 'Southward of Jerveise's Bay' at a gathering to 'decid(e) animosities' in Woolloomooloo (Sydney Gazette 1804:26) or Backhouse's meeting Aborigines from the Shoalhaven on their way to 'learn a new song at the Cowpastures' (Backhouse 1843:210) were but odd snapshots of what must have been regular occurrences. New curiosity must have attended these visits in the post-invasion period and there were undoubtedly some, like Broughton of the Shoalhaven, more inquisitive than others.

Whatever the circumstances of their meeting in 1818, Broughton had been engaged to assist Throsby in his groundbreaking overland expedition from the southern highlands to Jervis Bay (Throsby 1818:94). He guided Throsby's party from Liverpool his contribution, it would appear, being recognised in the naming of Broughton's Point, as Throsby refers to it, or Broughton's Pass Creek, as it is later mentioned by Meehan. It was probably Broughton who acted as interlocutor when the party met with a group of several local families at Pharreah by the Shoalhaven River<sup>16</sup>. The Aborigines were frightened by the sight of the Europeans and would all, Throsby noted, have run away in fear 'but for one of those...who were with us who assured them we should not hurt them, and by whom they were prevailed on to shake hands with me...' (Throsby

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it was by way of Bundle, then a familiar figure at Bong Bong and at the European's Wollongong property.

<sup>16</sup> Bundle played this role at another point in the journey, his name being mentioned more familiarly (Throsby 1818:94-101).

1818:97). Broughton's presence did not seem to relieve the 'anxiety and distrust' (Throsby 1818:100) that Throsby himself felt - 'having heard of the disposition of the Jarvis's Bay Natives' (ibid:98) - when large numbers of Aborigines gathered about his party at Currambene Creek. 'Their manners are in every respect daringly impertinent, compared with any others I ever before met with', he wrote, 'and I would advise who ever may go there to act with great precaution', though he would add in postscript that some of his suspicions proved 'perfectly groundless' (ibid:100).

Throsby had no doubts about Broughton, or presumably about recommending him as guide to Oxley and Meehan in their official surveys of the Shoalhaven the following year Back to Shoalhaven Week Committee 1926:16). There is no surprise then that he should have thought of Broughton as his good friend Berry made preparations to leave for the Shoalhaven.

The name Broughton must have struck Berry as more than a little uncanny. Many years before, in New Zealand, he had rescued the child Betsy Broughton as one of the few survivors of a Maori attack on the *Boyd* (Brenchley 1982). There was no mere coincidence here - for Betsy had later married Charles Throsby- but perhaps Berry saw in it something of fortune repaying past dues. Certainly, Broughton would prove nothing short of a godsend to Berry. For Broughton, Berry would turn out to be something of more questionable blessing but at that time, as he regaled Berry with the promising farming prospects of his homeland and boarded the *Blanch* for the southward voyage he did not seem to think so.

Heralding the advent of permanent white settlement at the Shoalhaven, Berry's arrival was marked in dramatic fashion. The endeavour began in tragedy. A small boat sent out from the cutter capsized while trying to negotiate the treacherous mouth of the Shoalhaven River; two of Berry's crewmen were lost. 'This tragical adventure' he wrote, 'upset all my arrangements, and therefore I immediately put spades into the hands of my men...' (Berry 1838:231). The task, to cut a channel for the passage of vessels between the Shoalhaven and Crookhaven Rivers, would take a month to complete. It was a considerable feat, decisively altering the course of the Shoalhaven and one, it could be imagined, which would not have augered well in Aboriginal eyes.



In the first weeks, it seems, the locals, in the main, chose to observe the Europeans and their activities at a distance. Berry recounts, the natives 'continued very shy and few showed themselves. I gave no concern about it, only treated such as came to us with kindness.' (Berry 1838:232). There arrived later a party from Jervis Bay, led by old Yager, with whom Berry says he immediately became 'great friends' (1838:232). Around the same time, Wajin, the chief, as Berry describes him, of the place where the canal was being cut - 'a stout elderly gentleman of a mild, sedate appearance & hairy as Esan himself' - also presented himself. 'Of course,' said Berry, 'I made him my friend and promised to give him a Brass Plate when he came to Sydney' (1838:232).

There must have been some consternation on the part of Berry's new acquaintances about the canal building enterprise which, at the least, severed a sizeable portion of country from the mainland. Moreover, the Aborigines may have been moved by a dread of cataclysmic consequences, arising from the disturbance of land and water. It could be telling that in recounting the visit of Yager, Berry mentions that he had 'from his own account...much intercourse with the visionary world' (1838:232).<sup>17</sup> Perhaps it was here, during his month's encampment on the Crookhaven, that Berry first heard predictions of impending natural disaster from the local Aborigines<sup>18</sup>. If they were troubled by such fears there would have been little fanciful in their imaginings, for in those years following upon the original white invasion, cataclysm had been a not infrequent visitor.

When the smallpox epidemic hit the Sydney Aboriginal population in 1789, the results were devastating. Recall the scene poignantly captured by Collins, when Araboo returned to Manly, in search of his people,

those who witnessed his expression and his agony can never forget either. He looked anxiously around him in the different coves we visited; not a vestige on the sand was to be found of human foot; the excavations in the

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<sup>17</sup> Although it should be noted, the observation is made with the hindsight of a much longer acquaintance.

<sup>18</sup> Brenchley's account that Berry sometimes listened to predictions of natural disaster (Brenchley 1982:71) is unsourced. I have not accessed Berry's papers to the same extent but some caution is warranted because Brenchley may possibly be relying here on an article by Lovegrove (MacFarlane

rocks were filled with the putrid bones of those who had fallen victim to the disorder; not a living person was anywhere to be met with...He lifted up his hands and eyes in silent agony for sometime; at last he exclaimed, 'All dead! All dead!' (cited Clendinnen 2003:100).

Such horror must have been repeated many times over. Butlin has estimated that more than 50% of the original Aboriginal population died from disease before immediate contact with the white invaders (Organ 1990:413). Its trace on the Jervis Bay population was noted by Grant, 'Many of the men and women I saw here were, in all appearance, marked with the small-pox' (Grant 1803:26). Though Grant speculated on whether the disease was autochthonous or introduced by earlier navigators, it most likely spread from the Sydney settlement along traditional lines of interaction. The sufferings of the people were represented in dance (see Atkinson 1863b:126) and gave rise to apocalyptic stories, such as that which recounted the demise of the prop which held up the sky (c.f. Willey 1979).

If Broughton held any concerns that the sky might fall they do not find expression in Berry's account. With work on the canal underway, Berry set off with a small party, including Broughton, to explore the country. His original intention had been to fix his abode on the north side of the river some six miles from the entrance, however, arriving at the place he found it little more than an interminable swamp and entirely unsuitable for his establishment. He sat down dejected. Broughton, smiling, was somewhat amused. Berry recounts their conversation:

'You told (me) Broughton, in Sydney, there was plenty of fine land at Shoal Haven'...

'& so there is, but this is not the place.'

'Why then did you bring me here.'

'I did not bring you here, you said you wanted to go to Balang and I only accompanied'.

'Very well Broughton, tomorrow you must take me to the right place,' (Berry 1838:231)

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1871:330-333) which she may have attributed in error to Berry.

The following day Berry was led to 'a different description of country' - the place where Broughton was born, at the head of a long creek. Pointing out the merits of the country, Broughton recommended an elevated site on the range for the homestead and stockyard and a cleared meadow where maize could be cultivated (1838:231-232).

The only problem was that the area was surrounded by a thick brush providing no thoroughfare through which to bring stock. '...(H)ere again,' says Berry, 'I had recourse to Broughton', who 'wrought very hard' with his brother<sup>19</sup>, Brogher and two or three others of his tribe to cut a course up the mountain (1838:232).

Brogher's enthusiasm for the task did not match Broughton's. Having been induced by Broughton to lend his assistance in the first place, Brogher, soon tired and threatened to leave. To encourage his staying, Hume shot him a pheasant. Brogher 'appeared to assent, roasted & eat the pheasant' but having finished, and observing it was a fine light night, he took his leave. Broughton, writes Berry, 'was very indignant at him, & told him that he would rather cut all the road himself than have his assistance.' (1838:232). With or without Brogher, Broughton laboured on, and in four or five days the road was complete. Thus at *Cullengutty* or *Coolangatta* - the mountain - the site for *Coolangatta*, Berry's homestead, was established.

There was probably something of classical parochial pride and sentiment in Broughton's special boasts about the merits of his birthplace but it is significant that, given an opportunity to direct attention away from and protect that area, Broughton, on the contrary was determined that it should be selected for Berry's purposes. It is a matter deserving of some consideration.

Based on our present understandings of Aboriginal land tenure, we may surmise that there were restrictions, under traditional law, over Broughton's ability to speak for country belonging to any one but himself. He could not, without permission, intrude upon, exploit the resources of, or claim powers of attorney over land outside his own estate. By focusing on the place of his own birth, Broughton not only remained within his rights, but ensured for himself a place from which his claims of

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<sup>19</sup> Whether the relationship was of biological or classificatory nature is uncertain.

proprietorship and authority were primary and undisputed.<sup>20</sup> It seems likely that beyond the promise of some tobacco, an old pair of trousers and a shirt, the establishment of a new settlement, represented the prospect of a continuing supply of desirable material resources and a new source of status and prestige, particularly for a young man of twenty four. Broughton, we might imagine, sought to maximise his advantage by bringing the new resource within his own sphere of control and influence.

If he was assured within Aboriginal circles that his prerogatives in relation to his own estate would be respected, it is likely that Broughton did not expect complete ignorance on the part of Europeans. In Broughton's view, the landscape he showed them spoke of his unquestionable rights and attachments. In 1819, as guide to their Shoalhaven exploratory expedition, Broughton showed them a highly personalised country, leading Oxley and Meehan, in one instance, to the summit of a hill where a pile of boughs marked the grave of his infant daughter (Back to Shoalhaven Week Committee 1926:16). Showing Berry to his birthplace, Broughton undoubtedly expected some respect and appreciation for the depths of his attachment to country and for his authoritative position. In time he would probably be bitterly, but not entirely, disappointed.

### **Early settlement and the freedom of the Aborigines**

Following Berry's initial sojourn at the Shoalhaven, development of the estate progressed quickly. Two years after establishment, there were some six hundred head of cattle, fourteen horses and two hundred and thirty pigs on the estate, while 120 acres of land had been planted to wheat, forty to maize, three to barley and three were designated as garden and orchard (Jervis 1941:35).

In a recent study, Bennett (2003) has minutely examined records from the Berry estate and other sources to provide a detailed picture of Aboriginal participation in the labour force of the new estate, which he concludes was significant, if minor. Certainly Aboriginal people played an important role as guides and in land clearance,

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<sup>20</sup> Although there may certainly have been senior members of his group whose authority superseded

but they also worked, if sporadically, tracking, crewing boats, in timber getting, bark and reed cutting and as couriers (2003:72, 79) and would later take up roles in agriculture and animal husbandry (2003:79, 81, 100). Their degree of incorporation into the coloniser's economy, however, was at this time and would remain for decades later, attenuated. Bennett's calculations based on available figures suggest that the contribution of rations and later money to the sustenance of the Aboriginal population was very minimal at least until the 1860s (2003:265) and remained relatively low throughout the century (2003:227), 'putting paid' as he writes, to claims by Bell that Aborigines in the region were fully dependent on the white economy by the late 1850s (2003:180).

The journals of Rev. Backhouse and Walker, who toured the Shoalhaven and Kangaroo Valley in 1836, reveal both the persistence of Aboriginal culture and the gradual infiltration of European material goods and ways. Backhouse portrays members of an Aboriginal party they encountered,

They were attired either in skin garments, fastened over one shoulder and under the other, or blankets, or in articles of European clothing; one having on a pair of trousers, another a shirt, a third a jacket, and so on...All the men had undergone the ceremony of having one front-tooth knocked out...and they had the cartilages of their noses perforated, and bones...through them...(Backhouse 1843:210).

He also describes in some detail the hunting and fishing implements and weapons carried, including a spear with green glass barbs (1843:206). One man, probably Broughton, had a musket which he had received from a settler. Aborigines in the area are said to feast on beached whales and to process and eat the Xamia nut, but also to 'well understand' the use of money with which they 'provide themselves with tea and sugar &c' (1843:207).

In an era when their society upheld a relatively secure and separate existence from the mainstream, I would argue, the scope for Aboriginal interchange and experimentation

was greater than it would prove to be in later periods when their ability to defend boundaries around their own life-worlds became more tenuous. Maintaining a strong subsistence base, Aboriginal people were able to resist their incorporation into exploitative and restrictive economic relations and to maintain an independent critical perspective on the colonial enterprise and capitalist economy.

At the point at which white settlement arrived in the area, the Shoalhaven Aborigines, it seems, were already alert to the social distinctions stratifying European society. An Aboriginal man arrived at Berry's newly built huts berating the overseer for the fact he had not been bestowed the title of local chief. In his attempts to cajole the man, the overseer offered to prepare a breast plate investing him with the title of 'settler', observing, after all, that Berry himself was only a settler. The man agreed, only he must, he said, be made a '*Free settler*' (Berry 1838:234).

Heavily valorised in a society where convicts were virtual slaves, the notion of freedom was crucial to the way Aboriginal people situated themselves with respect to European society. Aborigines were keen observers and would have noted that lack of freedom not only deprived a person of volition over, and benefit from his or her own labours, but that such status was taken as a proof of bad character, debasement and delinquency. While Europeans relegated Aborigines to the base of the social ladder, Aboriginal people themselves found, in their freedom, evidence of their own elevation. Berry was one who was concerned that the Aborigines were drawing the wrong lessons: 'Unfortunately, as the convicts were the working people, and freemen overseers, or not workers, they considered labour as degrading' (Berry 1871:329). In many cases, Aboriginal individuals quickly aligned themselves with free settlers, treating convicts with disdain and, not infrequently, taking an active role in their continuing confinement. Aborigines were instrumental in the capture and return to custody of many escaped convicts, their presence acting as a deterrent to the escape of many more.

If they were little moved by attempts to inculcate in them the value of work and the 'habits of industry', it may have been more likely due to perspicacity on their part, than to some innate deficiency, as the colonisers tended to suggest. Unfettered by the

ideology which had come to surround it, Aboriginal observers were in a position to offer acute critiques of the society which had been transposed to their soil.

'The aborigines appear to pity the Europeans, as persons under self-imposed slavery to toil, holding themselves as quite their superiors.' (Atkinson 1863:122).

On one occasion, when Broughton had been working for some weeks as a bricklayer's labourer, Berry observed that he was being jeered at by a woman. Upon his enquiry, Broughton reluctantly explained to Berry that this female relative had been 'jawing him' (Berry 1871:329); 'reproach(ing) him for working every day like a prisoner' (1838:234). Beyond the cognisance and refusal of the inferior status of the convict, the remark, I suggest, cut to a deeper rejection of subjection and exploitation.

The value accorded their freedom derived, not only from an appraisal of the inequities of European society, but from values inhering in the Aboriginal social and moral system, and from their direct experience of the comparative advantages offered by their traditional way of life. While they maintained the means of their own subsistence, they were loath to be incorporated in a European economy which, in their eyes, enslaved convict, worker and gentleman alike. Being 'well clothed and well fed' were insufficient inducements for a young man Billy, to remain long at his post of overseer. Meeting him later, Berry admonished him,

Well Billy, I expected you were to have become like a white man but am sorry to find that you have again become a wild bush native.

Oh no sir, I am no more wild than formerly, but I have become a free man again (Berry 1838:235).

In his reminiscences of the Aborigines, Berry reflected,

All the Shoal Haven Blacks consider themselves as my people, but I find it necessary to let do as they please as they cannot be restrained. I might as well

attempt to teach the birds of the air not to fly as to restrain their wanderings.  
(Berry 1838:240).

So while they were not strangers to Coolangatta (the head station) - 'wandering', as a later observer noted, 'about the settlement as they were in the habit of doing' (Ward cited Brenchley 1982:72) - for some time the Aborigines, proud and independent, held their own world together about it.

There was nothing entirely ubiquitous and inevitable about the particular relations established between blacks and whites. Despite a contemporary tendency to view the past in simplistic oppositional terms, the actors of the time both exhibited and recognised a complex array of attitudes, interests and personal responses within the gamut of race relations. The relationship between Broughton and Berry was, and remained, a special one. Broughton continued for many years a loyal and consistent worker, a fact attested both by the memoirs of Berry and by estate records (Bennett 2003:81). In his letters, Berry extols the labours of Broughton who had spent two months in 1826 '...up to the middle in water cutting reeds for the cow house – no white man could have stood it – even his health has been slightly affected – one day put one of the stoutest men into fever' (cited Bennett 2003:74). The case fits well with Morris' observation that early working relationships between Aboriginal people and white employers were often founded more on interpersonal relationships and a sense of personal obligation than purely on terms of exchange (Morris 1989:52).

### **Arawarra**

On the eastern face of Coolangatta mountain, three-quarters of a mile from the Coolangatta homestead, wrote R.H. Mathews, there is a remarkable sloping rock. Its upper surface is marked by six elongated depressions said to have been worn by the sliding feet of the spirits of generations of Aboriginal people. When a person died, their spirit went at night to the top of the rock, where it stood looking for a few moments out to the sea, some two miles distant, before planting its feet in the hollow grooves and sliding down the rock. At the bottom of the slide, the spirit jumped onto a long pole which reached out to the coast and, stretching beyond it, over the water. Crossing by this means the spirit reached another land on the far side of the sea. Here



it underwent a series of trials and tribulations - fire, a spear throwing crowd, a medicine man hurling missiles of figs compressed around quartz crystals, gigantic parrots trying to bite him or her - which he survived more or less successfully depending upon whether he had lived a good life or bad. The spirit of the good person escaped harm and was welcomed by his or her deceased relatives in a corroboree in a land of green grass and plentiful game, while the person who had broken tribal laws stumbled on - singed and bruised, gouged and battered - to the journey's end where he was taken away to join a camp of scabby and dirty individuals (Mathews 1899:lv).

It is dubious whether questions of final judgement would have yet troubled an old and dying man in those years, just following first white settlement on the Shoalhaven, when Berry met the fragile Arawarra being carried toward Coolangatta on his son's shoulders. 'The venerable old Gentleman merely came to take a last look of Cooloomgatta (sic) now occupied by strangers...' writes Berry, capturing something of the sadness that must have accompanied that knowledge. If he was to be judged on his own people's terms Arawarra might have fared well. It would seem white occupation had not easily been acceded by him, for it was reputed he had murdered a party of white cedar cutters at nearby Black Head. All the sawyers, 'before the Shoalhaven was settled by Berry and Wollstonecraft', says Berry were either 'destroyed or driven away by the natives' (Berry 1827:42). As Berry saw it, Arawarra's peaceful death, two days after their meeting, belied the many 'dark deeds of blood' to his name, 'Yet mark eternal Justice his bones have not been allowed to rest in their grave' (1827:42). With these righteous words, Berry despatched an Aboriginal craniological specimen to a Scottish academic institution concluding, '& it is to be hoped that his skull will throw such light on science as may sufficiently expiate the crimes which he committed' (Berry 1827:42).

Coolangatta remained an important ceremonial site for Aboriginal people of the area despite settlement. According to Mathews, who was shown the *bunan* grounds, the last ceremony took place there around 1886 (1896:328). The survival of their ceremonial life is also indicated in the journal of Backhouse who recorded that a large number of Aborigines from 'three tribes', Kangaroo Ground, Shoalhaven and Bong

Bong, had gathered to travel to the Cowpastures to 'learn a new song' in 1836 (1843:210).

### **The impact of settlement**

The fact that Berry's 1838 'Recollections of the Aborigines' fails to reflect upon the negative consequences his settlement at the Shoalhaven may have had on the means of subsistence for local Aboriginal people, might - given the insensitive attitudes of the day- go unremarked, except that Berry begins his account relating the details of a conversation held with an Aboriginal man who explained how pastoral occupation in his country, near Sydney, had seriously diminished game supplies. In this light, the omission becomes doubly callous or a denial - there is probably something of both in it - yet a third explanation also calls for attention.

The sheer size of the Berry estate and the style of its development must have mitigated to some degree the early impacts of settlement upon the local indigenous population. The original grant of 10,000 acres was expansive in itself, but through quit rent arrangements, crown and private purchase and by the reclamation of swamplands the estate was expanded, so that by 1863, according to Berry's figures, the total acreage was in the realm of 50,000 acres (Jervis 1841:42). Vast areas of the land, it seems, remained uncleared and undeveloped over many years. Berry and Wollstonecraft's farming efforts always remained modest; and although, according to Jervis, Berry was always at pains to underplay this aspect of the business, the two reaped their major profit from the country in timber, harvesting cedar in massive quantities (Jervis 1941:32). The underdevelopment of the estate constituted a state of affairs found reprehensible to Rev. Dr Lang, who harangued 'is there no remedy for such a state of things on the earth, which God made to be inhabited, and not to remain a vast solitude like the Berry estate at Shoalhaven?' (1941:80), however, for Aboriginal people, who elsewhere found themselves rapidly crowded out of the picture, it provided an important reprieve. Berry's writings indicate that, in 1838 at least, local Aboriginal people continued to live substantially on and off their own lands (Berry 1838:229-241).

On the coast, the immediate effects on the Aboriginal economy of land alienation were not as strong as those felt by their inland counterparts. Inland respondents to an 1845-6 NSW Government Select Committee on Aborigines survey recorded a devastating diminution in native game due to increasing European populations, cultivation and stocking. Although a reduction of game was also remarked of the coast, it was seen as less important. A Broulee observer writes, 'Kangaroos have diminished, but most of the natives in the district depend more upon the sea than the bush for food.' (cited Organ 1990:284).

The blanket returns <sup>21</sup> of the 1830s and 1840s indicate that beside some congregation of people about Berry's estate, Aboriginal people continued to live in disparate locations throughout the region. Several different groupings are identified in the Shoalhaven district, largely under Berry's influence, Gerrongong (sic), Broughton Creek, Murroo (Bomaderry area), Shoalhaven, Numba and Worrigea, while beyond that the lagoon (Lake Wollumboola), Jervis Bay North, Jervis Bay Creek, Wollimbia, Jervis Bay, Erowal, Bherewarrie (sic), St Georges Basin, Parma, Wandandian and Jerouangla also receive mention. Constituting semi-censuses of the Aboriginal population of the time, the returns are an invaluable source of information. On his returns, Berry lists all the men with their English and indigenous names, their probable age, number of wives and children and the designation of their tribe.

A growing population of children of mixed descent evinced the liaisons taking place between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women. There were likely elements of both coercion and voluntarism in the affairs. The Captain of a party of soldiers sent to the Shoalhaven to quell unrest intimated that interference with their women was a cause for grief (Bishop to Berry 1/11/1826 in Organ 1992). Berry recounts telling one man that drought conditions were a sign of God's displeasure at the natives allowing the whites to cohabit with their women. 'It is too bad of the Blacks,' the man replied 'but...the white men were equally bad.' (Berry 1838:235). It is possible that women suffered doubly; unfaithful wives beaten or even killed by jealous husbands. In a temper over recurrent infidelities Broughton so badly beat his second wife that she

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<sup>21</sup> The government had early instigated a practice of issuing Aboriginal persons with blankets on an annual basis. Records of those in receipt were recorded by the officials or settlers responsible for their distribution.

died. There is nothing to indicate in this case that her lover was white but Broughton did care for two half caste children as his own. Berry remarks on the loving acceptance of 'piebald' children by both the mothers and their husbands, although he has it, on hearsay, that this represented a change from early practices of infanticide (1938:239).

### **Trouble with the Aborigines**

So far as his written reminiscences are concerned, and those historical accounts upon which they are based, Berry's relationship with the Aborigines was always amiable. While labelling another settler a white savage for his treatment of the blacks, Berry maintained - 'by kind treatment we have been invariably good friends with the natives' (Berry 1838:234). Yet if Elizabeth Berry could write to her aunt in 1832 that Alexander had 'for many years never had need of a musket...in defence of his lands' (cited Brenchley 1982:91), it suggests that at some time things might have been different.

'It is true,' Berry recounts, 'that (the natives) used to steal for the first years of the establishment, a good deal of any crops of maize and potatoes, and we were obliged to watch them' but they were not, so he continues, anywhere near so troublesome as the cockatoos (Berry 1838:234). Such equanimity is easier in retrospect but even at the time a certain degree of tolerance was probably affordable to Berry, whose enterprise was bolstered by considerable wealth and whose main focus lay outside of his agricultural pursuits. Nevertheless correspondence dating from the time indicates that, whether he personally condoned it or not, Aboriginal pilfering was not magnanimously overlooked at Coolangatta; in fact deadly lessons were dealt. Souter, the overseer, wrote to his employer in 1824 reporting that, after Aborigines had been caught stealing tobacco, corn and potatoes at Numba, he had led a punitive party of nine men against them, shooting and killing an unspecified number (Brenchley 1982:63). It was not the only incident.

Relations were understandably soured and in 1825 a party of soldiers had to be sent from Sydney to quell hostilities (1982). About this time, Berry wrote to Wollstonecraft, who was then resident at Coolangatta,

...Take care you are not humbugged by the natives. Endeavour to get them all away. Poor Lieut. Lowe is committed to take his trial for shooting one of them at Hunters River. Tom tells me that they are fully determined to kill Wylie<sup>22</sup>. I shall therefore send down a couple of excellent riffles (sic)' (cited Organ 1992:56).

The possible ramifications of Berry's letter are perhaps ameliorated by Wollstonecraft's reply,

You desire me to turn away the Natives from the Farm - meaning, of course, to keep them away altogether. Pray how is that to be done! (Organ 1992:56).

Nevertheless, Berry certainly could not be counted amongst the radical sympathisers. He mocks Saxe Bannister,

Of course, we must not resist any aggression of these innocent children of nature, those cherished adopted favourites of the Attorney-General, who now may under the shadow of his silken gown murder the white people without impunity...(Organ 1992:56).

At the centre of trouble at Coolangatta, Broughton's brother, Brogher, emerges - official correspondence, identifying him as the native warrior leading hostilities (Branchley 1982:63). According to correspondence addressed to Berry from Souter in 1824, the whites at Coolangatta were just looking for a chance to do him in (1982:63) and by 1829, accused of murdering one of Berry's cedar getters<sup>23</sup>, Brogher was officially a wanted man. Broughton, who had been designated constable, was called upon to turn him in.

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<sup>22</sup> Branchley identifies Wylie as one of Berry's farm supervisors and a member of Souter's punitive party (1982:70).

<sup>23</sup> Promising to show two sawyers to a rich stand of cedar, Brogher was supposed to have turned suddenly upon them, killing one, while the other escaped to tell his tale. Story has it that Brogher cut the dead man's tongue out and ate it 'that he might speak good English'.

The incident brought to a head the tensions of divided loyalties weighing upon Broughton. He had remained a faithful and steady hand to Berry, labouring tirelessly, but it was a course which had clearly brought him into conflict with Brogher, the two brothers, according to Berry, in bitter feud (Brenchley 1982:65). It should hardly have surprised Berry however, if, as he reported, 'Broughton... ha(d) acted in a rather ambiguous manner over the affair (Brenchley 1982:65). When he refused to surrender Brogher to the authorities, he himself was arrested and brought before the magistrate<sup>24</sup>. He continued to deny all knowledge of the incident and of the whereabouts of his relative, but he was not believed. The magistrate ordered his breastplate removed 'till he redeemed his character'. Atkinson, daughter of the magistrate, writes:

'Meekly, with tearful eyes, he bowed his head while the much-cherished ornament was taken from his neck; his gun, too, was forfeited. (Atkinson 1863:118)

Brogher was finally captured by a constable sent from Sydney and taken aboard a boat bound for Sydney. When the constable fell asleep, however, Brogher extracted the padlock key from his pocket, freed himself and his companion, and made his escape. Rather than lay low, Brogher remained in the area, boasting of his feat and was promptly recaptured (Berry cited Organ 1990:160). At his trial, Berry sat on the Bench at the Police Court with the Police Magistrate. 'Poor Brogher smiled when he saw me', Berry recounts, ' "I have more than once walked with you alone in the bush when I was unarmed and you were armed with a spear, and might have easily killed me, had you wished." ' To Berry's address Brogher replied, ' "I would not have killed you, for you was my Master, and was always very good to me." "He is an ingenious fellow this," the Police Magistrate commented, "and I should be sorry to see him hanged" '. Nevertheless he was tried, convicted and, after much delay, put to his death. And perhaps Berry was not so sorry to be rid of a troublemaker, for surely he might have lent greater credence to Brogher's plea that he acted in self-defence, having himself been privy to certain expressed desires of his workers to see his end (Berry cited Organ 1990:328).

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<sup>24</sup> These details are based on an account by Atkinson in which the actors are unnamed however despite

When Berry notes a stark decline in the Aboriginal population in his 1838 reminiscences, he is reluctant to admit any part in it himself, his arrival a mark of time more than an originary source of suffering,

...Their numbers I am sorry to say have greatly decreased since I came to Shoal Haven. A good many have died in Sydney in consequence of drinking, a few in their native feuds of violence, and a good many from measles. The natives themselves told me that a good many also had left the Colony in ships<sup>25</sup> (1838:240).

The effects of disease and alcohol related sicknesses and assaults on the population were reported officially (Bennett 2003:60) and in contemporary newspaper reports (see Organ 1990). An examination of the blanket returns of the 1830s shows a low ratio of children to adults, indicative both of low fertility rates and high infant mortality (Organ 1990:213-215)<sup>26</sup>.

Aborigines entertained few illusions about the underlying cause of their plight. A telling analogy was drawn by 'a Native Boy' who worked as bee master for Berry, between the Aborigines, harmless native bees, English bees and the white man. The English bees, he said, 'killed the Native Bees and stole their honey...they were all the same as the white men who were becoming Master over all...' (Berry 1850:94-95). Berry could only concur as he related the tale to his sister.

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some slight differences in detail it seems certainly to refer to the same case (Atkinson 1863:117).

<sup>25</sup> It is possible that some were men were drawn into the whaling industry, otherwise the only verifiable instance is the recruitment of several Aborigines of the Shoalhaven and Jervis Bay to take part in Batman and Robinson's drives amongst the Tasmanian Aborigines (Campbell and Plomley cited Organ 1992:71).

<sup>26</sup> The situation was not altogether grim, Berry asserting, despite the apparent low ratios, 'there are a good many young people & children amongst them and they seem fine and healthy people' (240).

## **Closer settlement and increasing enmeshment**

The end of transportation and the allure of the goldfields had created a shortfall of white labourers in the mid 1800s. Some landowners and contractors who originally utilised Aboriginal labour for the exchange of small rations stepped up their recruitment of Aborigines. Berry's response was, in the main, to recruit extra labour from overseas, with Maoris, Chinese and Germans being brought to work on the estate (Bennett 2003). There was, says Bennett, some increase in Aboriginal labour participation but their contribution, although important, remained small (Bennett 2003:205). For their part, Bennett found that working for rations and wages still constituted a 'minor economic strategy' for the resident Aboriginal population, responsible, according to Bennett's calculations for less than 12% of their ongoing subsistence needs (Bennett 2003:206). No more than 50% of those of working age were found to have ever worked and only a small fraction worked consistently. Although records are sparse, the involvement of women appears to have been rare.

Greater shifts, however, were underfoot. Although Berry had continually increased his landholdings - partly (according to Jervis) to prevent the encroachment of neighbours on his solitude - closer settlement could not be staved off. For perhaps a decade, Coolangatta had remained relatively isolated, but in time Berry was joined by others, with new settlement proliferating especially on the southern banks of the Shoalhaven, about Terara. In the 1850s, admitting productivity levels were embarrassingly low on the sprawling estate, Berry was forced to turn to a system of tenantry, almost feudal in nature (Jervis 1941:41). A newspaper report of 1855 greeted the change with enthusiasm,

...a liberal and free letting of land is now taking place. The splendid estate of Messrs. Berry, without an equal in New South Wales (or perhaps in the world) is being divided into comfortable sized farms, and the forest and bush are fast falling in all directions before the improving hands of man; houses are erecting in all directions and the lucky tenants of the land clearing and fencing (cited Jervis 1941:41).



Aborigines on the Berry estate and surrounding country became increasingly constricted and marginalised and the system of dual occupancy, which had enabled them to sustain themselves and their life world in relative independence, came under growing pressure.

A story from Terara in 1859, provides a glimpse of the resentment and frustration of Aboriginal people at the growing intrusion and hegemonic impositions of Europeans, and their attempts to mitigate or remove that unwelcome presence. The events follow the trial and jailing of an Aboriginal man for manslaughter of his wife.

Many of them told me we had no business to touch Roger; that his gin was his own - a council was summoned, and the result of their deliberations was communicated to me by the wife of their great Mystery man - Johnny Burriman. He was deputed to go to the head waters of the Shoalhaven, place certain stones in the stream, and do certain other acts, conveyed to me, not in spoken words, but by contortions of visage, and rolling of eyeballs. The result (*cerdat quisquis*) was the great flood of 1860, which devastated Shoalhaven (Lovegrove cited MacFarlane 1871:332).

Increasingly alienated from their own lands and sources of sustenance, and perhaps beholden to various addictive substances introduced by Europeans - tea, sugar, tobacco, alcohol – and to the desire for the accoutrements of modern life, the need for cash pushed Aborigines to greater dependence on waged labour. From their camps at Greenwell Point, Pyree and other locations, Aborigines were recruited for the harvesting of the maize and potato crops and the clearing of the land (Wallis 1988:86).

In 1853, the appearance of a civilised homestead in the district of Shoalhaven was very peculiar - a modern-built cottage, a pretty garden, out-buildings of the roughest construction...and in the midst of these - perhaps within a few feet of the house itself - a cluster of conical, bark-covered kennels, for the use of those Blacks who had entered out *en masse* in reaping time, and at corn gathering, and generally to perform any unskilled labour that might be wanted. As a rule, they acted under the directions of a Chief; it being found more

desirable to locate themselves as a body to encounter the importunities of single families; and in all things they stood in great awe of that Chief<sup>27</sup>. (Lovegrove in MacFarlane 1871:330).

From a list of materials given to Aboriginal people from 1849-1857, Bennett has constructed a picture of 'the typical agricultural worker and his possessions' telling of an increasing degree of Aboriginal incorporation into the European lifeworld by this time.

He was dressed in a shirt and trousers, with a handkerchief in his pocket, socks and boots on his feet and a hat on his head. At mealtimes he ate food cooked on a camp oven from a plate using a knife and a fork, with pickles and mustard added for taste. He drank tea from a cup and saucer. At night he went to sleep in his bed tick with a coat or blanket for warmth. He shaved using a razor and mirror. At work, he carried a pocket knife to help him with odd jobs (Bennett 2003:192).

### **Jervis Bay**

While in the Shoalhaven area, their participation in the agricultural industry was key, at Jervis Bay, unsurprisingly, Aboriginal people were drawn into the sea-oriented activities which dominated that area's early development. There is a brief historical reference from 1844 to the employment of '10 blacks' at a whaling station at Jervis Bay (Robinson cited in Egloff et. al. 1995:29). This may have referred to a station which operated for a short time in the 1840s at Montagu point, on the northern shores of Jervis Bay (Thomson 1979) or possibly to another establishment which is believed to have operated at Hole-in-the-Wall (Egloff et.al. 1995:60).

Huskisson was established in the 1840s and developed as a port servicing passing ships. It became a centre for ship building, an activity which continued there until very recent times. Like other towns, Huskisson's development saw the accompanying emergence of an Aboriginal fringe camp. Referred to today by local Aborigines as

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<sup>27</sup> According to Lovegrove the headman at Terrara was a man named Peter who also held sway over the

Bilong, but also known historically as Coorumbun, the camp was located on the eastern bank of Currambene Creek, some way upstream from its mouth at Jervis Bay. Archaeological (see Egloff et.al 1995) and historical evidence<sup>28</sup> make it clear that the area had been frequented by Aboriginal people on a regular basis prior to its transformation into a permanent settlement. Bilong remained as an unofficial Aboriginal community until perhaps the 1930s or 1940s.

A precious glimpse of nineteenth century Aboriginal life at Coorumbun survives in the form of a tale recorded by MacKenzie in the local Tharumba language. Recorded in 1872, it apparently records earlier times. As well as providing evidence of Aboriginal involvement in the whaling industry, it gives other clues about Aboriginal life and relationships with Europeans in the area at that time.

The westerly wind is blowing strong, the vessels can't come in, they will be driven back. There is a vessel lying off New Bristol; she must have come in last night. She looks like a whaler; perhaps she has killed a whale, and fetched it in, and is tiring out. I saw a sperm whale spouting yesterday; if the vessel stops here she will catch plenty whales. Let us go and fetch them wood; they will give us plenty bread and drink. Perhaps we shall see some of our friends; my brother went to sea a long time ago. We'll ask for the boat; to walk along the beach will make us tired. This westerly wind will make it go quick. Let our king ask for the boat; he is a good man, a favourite of the chief; the white people like him. Our chief is calling; he has got it, the white man has given it. Come on quick, let us make haste. Now then, jump in. How many are going to pull? There are four to pull and one to steer. When we get out of the creek, we'll put up the mast, and hoist the sail. Fetch the fish spears, we'll spear some fish. She goes quick, she's a good boat. Here we are at the mouth of the creek. Now then, up with the mast and sail. How fast she goes! We'll soon be there. I know that vessel; that is the one my brother went in. I can see the men walking on the deck. Some of them are blacks. Now I can see them quite plain. There is one brother looking

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Jervis Bay and Burrier Aborigines (Lovegrove in MacFarlane 1871:330).

<sup>28</sup> Reporting on the 1818 exploration, Throsby records his anxiety at Currambene Creek where large numbers of Aborigines flocked about his camp (1818:99).

over this way now. Let us take the boat on the lee side of the vessel. Take down the mast and furl the sail. Make fast! Get up on the deck (Mackenzie 1874).

Aboriginal life on the south coast, in the mid to late nineteenth century, has been captured in the drawings of Mickey, an amateur Aboriginal artist of Ulladulla. Mickey's artworks date from the 1870s and 1880s, although it seems likely that some draw on remembered events. In style and subject matter the drawings combine traditional Aboriginal and European features. His major themes include native flora and fauna, traditional food gathering activities, corroborees, marine life, fishing and shipping. Mickey gives minute and playful attention to the details of everyday life, dress and habit (Sayers 1994:52-57). He makes faithful representations of fish and animal species, some reminiscent of an X-ray style, while the attention to detail on ship sails and rigging is remarkable. The drawings suggest continued Aboriginal reliance on natural food resources using traditional hunter-gatherer techniques, a trade in cottage crafts (sale of tea tree or cabbage tree brooms) (1994:55), as well as involvement in local industries such as fishing, shipping and timber milling. Sayers has published a selection of Mickey's drawings and has subjected them to more refined analysis.

### **Jerrinja antecedents on the Berry estate**

Before leaving this discussion of the Berry estate brief mention<sup>29</sup> will be made of the names of those who feature in farm records who are known to be connected genealogically or historically with the present Jerrinja community. Jack Carpenter, who as we shall see in the following chapter, was resident at Crookhaven Park prior to the removal of Aboriginal workers from the Berry estate, was himself at one time an employee on the estate. Bennett notes that Carpenter Jack worked consistently from November 1848 to February 1852 (2003:177). Carpenter is believed to be the forebear of a large proportion of the present Jerrinja community. The surname Longbottom, which remains important in the community today, emerges clearly, as do the names Lloyd, Judson and Amatto bearers of which are remembered as former

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<sup>29</sup> For further detail the reader is referred to the main body and appendices of Bennett's 2003 study.

Jerrinja residents. These four families are probably those families represented in the group removed from the estate to Roseby Park at the turn of the century. Oral testimony relates that the Wellingtons at Jerrinja are, like the Amattos, descendants of Aboriginal women and Maori workers on the estate.

By virtue of their close proximity to Sydney and their situation along a major travel route, the Aboriginal people of the Shoalhaven and Jervis Bay were exposed early to the effects of first colonisation. The tenor of initial encounters between Aborigines of the district and the invaders ranged during the exploratory phase from convivial merriment to violent confrontation, the attitudes of explorers, adventurers and new settlers (and hence the nature of contact) coming increasingly under the influence of negative, newspaper-propagated stereotypes. There is little evidence to show large numbers of Aboriginal lives lost in direct confrontation - although such information would hardly have been broadcast - but a devastating toll is likely to have been wrought, early in the piece, by introduced diseases<sup>30</sup>, with profound impacts upon indigenous social structure and institutions.

The arrival of Berry in 1822, marked the advent of permanent white settlement at the Shoalhaven. It did not occasion any immediate hostilities, although objections to the intrusion may have been limited by what had been a recent and clear demonstration of European might in the Sydney context. The Aboriginal response was, in any case, far from passive, the active interest, engagement and intervention, on the part of some Aboriginal people, directly affecting the course of settlement.

Berry, it seems, always remained grateful to Broughton and throughout his life he continued to receive special favour. Broughton, Berry noted in 1838, 'is considered as a kind of privileged person on the place, and his slops and rations are always forthcoming.' (1838:239). The privileges were hardly munificent - the blanket return of 1834 showed that Broughton received two blankets (Organ 1990:191) compared to everyone else's one - but they provided some small advantages and personal acknowledgement. In what Jervis interprets as a lonely life (the historian studiously avoids all mention of Aborigines) - Berry counted Broughton as 'a great friend of

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<sup>30</sup> The effects of smallpox and exacerbation of lung diseases have been mentioned in instance.

mine' (1871 cited Organ 1990:328). Commending him to Governor Gipps in 1842, Berry referred to him as 'my oldest surviving Black prince' (van Ummersen 1992:5) and, though it can be supposed that he was referring to Broughton's behaviour in respect of the British Royalty when he wrote that he 'always conducted himself a Good and Loyal subject', it was likely Broughton's faithfulness that Berry appreciated most of all.

Although there was a level of engagement in the labour force, Aboriginal people generally were far from willing to be substantially incorporated within European frames as subjugated employees of the estate. In general they undertook work on a sporadic basis, for pointed aims, and for the most part continued to sustain themselves by traditional means in dual occupation of their own lands. Where conflicts of interests emerged, however, the power of the colonial presence made itself felt in violent imposition over Aboriginal bodies, directly or through legal mechanisms. Tensions between colonial and indigenous ideologies produced conflicts within and between Aboriginal individuals.

Closer settlement of the region, particularly from the 1850s, increasingly marginalised Aboriginal people from their traditional lands and, precluding them from the means of their subsistence, forced greater degrees of enmeshment with, and dependence on the colonial economy, although not to the degree previously assumed (Bennett 2003:180). The presence of Aboriginal people in the settler landscape was an accepted part of life at least up to mid-century. At this time, the radical exclusion of Aborigines from mainstream social circles, which would characterise the following era in black/white relations, was yet to emerge. By the 1870s, however, reflections back on the everyday conjunction of pretty homesteads and bark-covered kennels had come to find such circumstances 'peculiar' (Lovegrove in MacFarlane 1871:330). As the sources of distinction between Aborigines and whites began to diminish, and increasing sites for competition grew, the drawing of boundaries became, as we will see, increasingly urgent on the part of whites who placed pressure on the government to intervene. In the following chapter we shall see how the Aboriginal workers and residents on the Berry estate came to be shifted from the land and placed under institutional control on the Roseby Park Aboriginal Reserve.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### INSTITUTIONALISED AT THE MARGINS

The turn of the century, marking the demise of the Berry estate and a new era of government intervention in Aboriginal affairs, heralded a major change in Aboriginal/white relations in the Shoalhaven. In this chapter, we will examine how Aboriginal people, already squeezed to the margins of white settlement, came to be confined upon the new Roseby Park government reserve and were increasingly made subjects of State institutional control. I argue that the attenuation of obvious signs of difference, in skin colour, material culture and life style, was accompanied by high levels of government and public anxiety, leading to concerted boundary making efforts on the parts of whites. Concentration on reserves, curfews and other controls over Aboriginal movement, segregation of schools and public facilities, and the proliferation of stereotypes, all served to redefine and reinforce the black/white divide and to minimise interaction and competition for social and economic resources. Government policies of assimilation, which sought to solve the dilemma by remaking Aborigines as ordinary (read white) citizens, were resisted, both by the whites most vulnerable to absorbing them within their ranks, and by Aboriginal people themselves.

As this and following chapters will show, Aboriginal people instituted their own measures of boundary maintenance, eking out free spaces within institutional regimes, developing their own stereotypes and patrols of group membership and interaction and taking political action to protect their domains. As an encapsulated and disempowered minority, Aboriginal people find themselves forced to assume a more defensive mode. The narrowing and restricting of interaction becomes, I will argue, a necessary survival strategy. While the development of an oppositional culture will be shown as relevant to the present case, it does not exhaust the sources or reasons for distinction. In the following chapters, we will examine how processes of exclusion, on the part of whites, and of cloistering, on the part of Aborigines, served to protect a

vital space of belonging, difference and cultural autonomy, rooted in indigenous tradition.

### **End of an era**

When following upon the death of David Berry, John Hay Esq. returned to Coolangatta in 1890 to take up his inheritance, he was met with a hero's welcome from the employees of the Estate.

On driving up the avenue leading to the residence, a very neat triumphant arch constructed of flowers and ferns came in view, and on nearing which the words, "Welcome Home" could be seen, worked in large characters across the arch (A Correspondent 1890:page unmarked).

On the lawns of the homestead, an 80 foot marquee had been erected. There was a stage at one end, in front of that a single long table and running down the entire length of the tent on either side, two long lines of tables 'loaded with a profusion of cakes, buns, and all the tempting accessories to the cup which cheers but not inebriates.' (Morton 1890).

The great tea party and concert, which followed, had been arranged by the employees and the tenants of the Estate, as a demonstration of their respect and affection for their erstwhile manager, and now new employer. After the guest of honour and his wife, invited dignitaries, and the employees and their families – two to three hundred in all – had enjoyed some refreshment, seats were arranged for the speeches. H. G. Morton, Hay's manager, opened proceedings, commending the large attendance and marking the fact that this was no ordinary meeting or political rally 'but a pure meeting of love and esteem between a large employer of labour and his servants' (Morton 1890:2).

Mr Hawkins Snr rose next to make the official address on behalf of the employees -

Dear Sir, - We your employees on the Shoalhaven estate, desire to heartily welcome Mrs Hay and yourself on your return to Coolangatta. The uniform kindness and thoughtful consideration that have characterised your intercourse



with us in the past leads to the belief that you will be a true friend, as well as a worthy employer. We wish Mrs Hay and yourself long life, attended by health and happiness in the future (Morton 1890:2).

A copy was presented in album form, 'beautifully illuminated in old English coloured and enlarged capitals, the whole being handsomely bound in dark ruby morocco leather' (Morton 1890:2), and more words followed about Mr Hay's regard for the comfort and welfare of his workers and of the privileges he had bestowed upon them.

Mr Hay responded with great humility, thanking them from the bottom of his heart, and saying that the testimonial would be valued as 'an heir-loom of the indissoluble tie of friendship, which he was happy to find existed between himself and the workmen on the estate' (Morton 1890:2). He told the audience he had never sought to gain their popularity, but had simply tried to pursue his duty conscientiously. Committing himself to continuing in the same vein, he thanked them once more and resumed his seat, to loud and appreciative cheers.

There followed an evening of musical entertainments with cultivated renditions of 'Bonny Prince Charlie' and other favourites, poetry recitals and performances by the Coolangatta Brass Band (Morton 1890:2). Before the night was over, there were more speeches from the invited dignitaries, eulogising the happy position of Mr Hay's employees. Hon. P.L.C. Shepherd, M.L.C. responding to an invitation from the Chair, held forth on the symbolism of the occasion,

In these days (sic) the conflict between capital and labor, when strikes and organizations hostile to capital were doing their best to ruin the country, it was encouraging and hopeful that there at least capital and labor were walking hand in hand for their mutual benefit, as indeed it should always be (Morton 1890:2).

Mr P.H. Morton, M.L.A. rose to tell the assembled how lucky they were, to have a master who gave no regard to creed or colour, 'besides English, Scottish, Irish, and Australians', he said, 'there were Germans, Italians, New Zealanders, Egyptians and other nationalities represented amongst the employees, and they all lived in perfect

harmony together' (A Correspondent 1890). But where, we might ask, in this account<sup>1</sup>, and on this occasion - or at least the telling of it - did the Aboriginal employees of the estate fit in?

### **The break-up of the estate**

For all the talk and, quite probably, heartfelt sentiment, of love and esteem, the employees and tenants, of the Coolangatta estate, understood themselves to be in a highly precarious situation. With the death of their old patron Berry, the future of their livelihoods, of the lands that they had been farming, of their family's fortunes depended on what John Hay Esq. would decide to do with his new inheritance. With enormous charitable legacies made out in Berry's will, the estate was not left in a well-balanced financial position, and the employees and tenants were extremely nervous that the whole lot might be sold out from beneath their feet.

As it turns out, and vindicating their estimates of him, Hay was - at least according to the historians - generous in his dealings with his underlings. To ensure that all obligations could be met, he launched on major development and reclamation works; projects that, it may be supposed, kept all his workers in gainful employ. The estate was subsequently dismantled, but the tenants were given the chance to purchase their holdings, on 'liberal terms', and many took up the opportunity to do so. Meanwhile, the Hays continued to operate their own enterprise on reduced holdings (Back to Shoalhaven Week Committee 1926:20-21).

But what of the Coolangatta Aborigines, the other residents, employees and dependents of the estate? In the memories and oral traditions of those Aboriginal families who lived and worked on the Berry estate, Mr Berry and Mr Hay also feature approvingly and affectionately. 'He was a wonderful man. He looked after people...Meat, every beautiful rations too. I've never seen the like' (Mrs Longbottom 1965: J06 001). Long before Berry's death, however, it is clear the Coolangatta Aborigines had been pushed into marginal and unprofitable spaces on the Estate. Their camp, in a gully at the northern foot of Coolangatta Mountain (Bayley cited

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<sup>1</sup> Assuming the references to Australians was at the time a reference to non-Aboriginal Australians.

Organ 1990:350), referred to by whites as the blacks' camp, was known to its residents as the Black Swamp (Mrs Longbottom 1965:J06 001). Puzzlingly, in an interview conducted with Janet Mathews in 1965, Mrs John Longbottom describes it as a place of subterranean fires, thick with ti tree but smouldering below the surface and punctuated with holes down which one could - as she said she herself had done on two occasions - accidentally fall and get burned (Mrs Longbottom 1965:J06 001). This hellish imagery would fit well with reports of a fever which broke out amongst the one hundred and thirty residents of the overcrowded camp in 1890 (Egloff u.d.:12).

For over seventy five years of white settlement in the Shoalhaven, Aborigines had retained some occupation - however diminished - on the estate, but at the turn of the nineteenth century, it seems there was no longer a place envisaged for them. The estate was broken up and the Coolangatta Aborigines, (or at least most of them)<sup>2</sup> were 'handed over', perhaps at Aborigines Protection Board behest, to government control. Hay sympathetically promised to make a donation of fifty pounds for new housing and to supply ongoing rations to three of the families (APB 1900 cited Fox u.d.:31.2) but, whether anxious for their welfare, or to have them removed from the estate, in 1900, he wrote to the Minister of Lands, stating that he was 'desirous to having the Coolangatta Aborigines located on the Reserve, proposed to be dedicated for use of the Aborigines...before the approaching winter" (cited Thomson 1979:29).

### **The Aborigines Protection Board**

Direct state intervention in the management and welfare of the Aboriginal population, was a relatively new innovation for the New South Wales government at that time. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, it had tended to let private land holders, missionaries and other charitable organisations attend to (or neglect) the on-the-ground welfare needs of Aborigines, and oversee them, as they saw fit. The Victorian government had established a Board for the Protection of Aborigines in the 1850s. Aboriginal people were forced onto a limited number of reserves, where they were placed under the strict control of missionaries, with cruel child removal practices implemented (Goodall 1996:88). In New South Wales, however, it was not until

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<sup>2</sup> Mrs Longbottom's account suggests that her family may have remained longer, which would account

1881, when the issue of Aboriginal welfare had become an unavoidable thorn in the government's side, that George Thornton, a member of Parliament and former Mayor of Sydney, was appointed Protector of Aborigines (Thomson 1979:9).

New South Wales did not immediately follow the hardline lead of Victoria. Goodall notes that, in his report to government on the condition of Aborigines, Thornton strongly recommended the government pursue a policy of setting aside small farming reserves for Aborigines, without conceiving the need for surveillance or control (1996:89).

I am strongly of the opinion that reserves should be made in such parts of the Colony, where it can be conveniently and usefully done, for the purposes of the aborigines, to enable them to form homesteads, to cultivate grain, vegetables, fruit, etc, etc, for their own support and comfort. I have every reason to hope and expect great success from granting reserves of from 10 to 40 acres of land for the uses of the aborigines in their own particular districts (Thornton 1882 cited Goodall 1996:89).

Thornton saw this as an effective way to cultivate self-reliance, industriousness and economic independence. 'This would be,' he wrote, 'a powerful means of domesticating, civilizing and making (the Aborigines) comfortable' (Thornton 1882 cited Goodall 1996:89).

The government had already been in the practice of setting aside reserves for Aborigines on an *ad hoc* basis. In her studies, Goodall has documented that significant numbers had been notified from the 1860s, most often at the instigation of Aborigines, or in recognition of their occupation of land (1990, 1996). In this respect, Goodall's work serves as a corrective to common assumptions that the early creation of Aboriginal reserves represented an imposition of government authority, against the will of the people.

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for the fact that her daughter, a current resident of Jerrinja, says that she was born at Coolangatta.

In 1883, the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) was established, assuming responsibility over the creation of Aboriginal reserves. In the early years it continued, in the main, to be driven by the requests of Aboriginal people and, increasingly, by the demands put by white pressure groups for segregation (Goodall 1996:93). The APB began its existence, so Goodall has pointed out, with very restricted powers, without a legislative base and in the absence of any clearly defined government policy (1996:90). Nevertheless, it seems to have quickly established a sense of its preferred direction - toward greater authority over Aborigines - asserting in its first report that nothing could protect them but

some controlling power which can not only offer them what is for their good but constrain them to the acceptance of it' (cited Parberry 1986:86).

It began to press the government to pass legislation that would grant it 'the custody and control of aborigines of all ages and sexes...in like manner as a parent has the right to the control and custody of his children of tender years' (APB cited Thomson 1979:10).

### **The founding of Roseby Park Aboriginal Reserve**

That Aboriginal demands may have played a part in the establishment of reserves in the Shoalhaven, is suggested by the presentation of a petition from local aboriginal people, to the Minister of Lands, requesting that 'certain places be set aside for them for camping, hunting and fishing purposes' (The Telegraph and Shoalhaven Advertiser 1881 in Egloff et al 1995:46). If Thomson's research is comprehensive, the first Aboriginal reserve in the Jervis Bay/Shoalhaven region, was gazetted in 1881, an area of 700 acres, in the vicinity of Long Beach, on the northern shores of Jervis Bay (Thomson 1979:19). An 1882 report records that, at Jervis Bay, as distinct from Currumbene (another local settlement), biscuits or flour, sugar, clothing, knives, tomahawks, cooking-utensils, ammunition, boat and gear, fishing-tackle, &c were supplied to Aborigines. Since others received only basic food supplies, it appears that the issue of these special supplies may have related to the establishment of the new reserve, although the report also notes that 'The Jervis Bay blacks get Government rations. This is necessary as there are few white people in that locality.' (Report of

the Protector, to 31 December 1882 in *Organ* 1990:341).

The Jervis Bay Reserve never developed into a major settlement. In 1890, a report complained that 'Aborigines refused to reside there.'<sup>3</sup> It continued, '...but if they could be induced to do so, no better spot could be found in the District upon which to centralize the whole of the Aborigines in the Police Districts of Shoalhaven and Dowling' (Thomson 1979:27). This may have reflected more upon the Board's increasingly centralist aims than complete neglect of the area by local Aborigines. Egloff has recorded an oral tradition that there were families living at Long Beach prior to the commencement of naval gun practice on Beecroft Peninsula in 1895. At that time people relocated to the Bilong settlement at Currumbene Creek. A reference survives of a Granny Goulding, who used to row across the bay to her old home at Long Beach (Egloff 1995:56). Jerrinja residents speak of an old 'mission' settlement at Long Beach; and Cane notes that the National Parks and Wildlife Service have a registered site at Long Beach, called the 'Dwelling Hole', a waterhole which is said to have been used by residents for washing and drinking (Cane 1988:35).

Independent camps of Aboriginal people were still distributed throughout the Shoalhaven region, at Currumbene Creek, Greenwell Point, Pyree and at Crookhaven Park. Reminiscences of local Europeans record that Jack Carpenter, his wife Judy, their daughter Lucy and her husband Jimmy and Chip were all resident at Crookhaven in the late 1800s.

They were well cared for by the pilot, Captain Bishop, and the crew at the (Crookhaven Heads) lighthouse, while Judy would take her Saturday morning around the farmers at the lower part of Pyree, not forgetting to call at Mr Jas Morison's butcher's shop. Judy was popular with everyone, and always came home well laden with food and garments. This group all lived to a great age. Jimmy Bundle was a great ploughman, and was often employed by the late Samuel Caines, on what is now Bourne's property (Aberdeen 1941).

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 6 for mention of spiritual significance of area.

Crookhaven Park had been set aside as a public recreation reserve in the 1870s, through the efforts of a local parliamentarian by the name of Roseby - hence its popular name (Jerringa Tribal Council 1978). It was a favourite picnic place for daytrippers from Nowra, who would travel mostly by ferry. The site was quite remote from close white settlement and well buffered by the Crookhaven River on one side and pastoral properties on the other.

In 1900, Roseby Park caught the attention of the Aborigines Protection Board, who were looking for somewhere to house the Coolangatta Aborigines. An original plan to accommodate them at Seven Mile Beach had already faltered. In September 1899, it had reserved 42 acres there for the purpose (Thomson 1979:28), however, the proposal had met with strident protests from the local Berry Progress Association and a local police report which had, perhaps in league with the lobbyists, recommended the place 'altogether unsuitable for a reserve' (Thomson 1979:28). The Board was forced to capitulate. In APB's eyes, Crookhaven Park represented a viable alternative. The park's isolation would have appealed to their increasing preoccupations with the baneful influences of whites upon their charges, and sensitivity to the rising hysteria, amongst whites, about Aborigines in their midst. Even here the APB faced opposition. In a comment which may have been concerned with the already resident population, or alternatively suggestive of an earlier proposal for a reserve there, the Shoalhaven Telegraph reported, in 1898, that a local alderman had voiced, 'A strong objection to these blacks being located at Roseby Park, which was a favourite picnic resort' (Antill 1982: ). There was, however, no police objection. The relevant report, giving recognition to the preexisting residence of Aboriginal people, deemed the place 'suitable and sufficient for Aborigines at Crookhaven Park and Coolangatta' (Thomson 1979:29).

Despite Council's objections, and possibly with the political support of John Hay, the Secretary of Lands excised 32 acres from Crookhaven park for the reserve in September 1900. Five houses were transferred from the old camp at Coolangatta and five new ones were erected. By the end of the year the APB could report that 'the Aborigines, ten families in all, are now comfortably housed at the new location' (cited

Fox u.d:31.2)<sup>4</sup>. There was no immediate APB presence on the reserve, although a teacher must have been in daily attendance after 1903 when a school was established (APB 1904:8). The reserve was visited by missionaries from time to time<sup>5</sup>. In 1903, there were 65 Aboriginal people resident at Roseby Park, 27 adults and 38 children. The children and nineteen adults were in receipt of rations, the others supported themselves by fishing or gained employment in the local vicinity (APB 1904:8).

### **Increasing intervention**

In the early 1900s, the Board began to step up its calls for the government to provide it with legislatively backed powers to effect its role. Whereas in 1887, it had envisaged the eventual demise of the Aboriginal race, and saw its own role primarily in terms of helping 'to make its latter end as happy and comfortable as possible' (cited Thomson 1979:11), it had now become increasingly aware of, and alarmed by, a rapid growth in a population of people of mixed descent, who continued to identify as Aboriginal. In 1882, only 26.7% of the Aboriginal population had been identified as of mixed descent, but in 1900 the proportion was estimated at 55% (Goodall 1996:118). The APB viewed this increase in its constituency anxiously, both because of its economic implications, and because they apparently found the interstitial identity of their charges disconcerting. The need for resocialisation and reform became pressing priorities.

Roseby Park became an early focus for the APB's new thrust toward intervention. In 1906, it was declared a new government station and placed under permanent supervision. Combining the old ambitions of Thornton for self-reliance and domestication, through farming, with a new emphasis on reform, the APB planned to turn Roseby Park into a 'training home where those in residence would be taught farm work and carpentry' (Antill 1982:71). A resident manager, specially trained for his new role was installed. At the same time the APB had acquired a further 39 acres to

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<sup>4</sup> Although note Bennett reports that most of the Aboriginal residents must have moved sometime after the April 1901 census, 60 Aboriginal people being recorded as resident on the Estate at that time. He also notes that 23 members of the Carpenter and Bundle families were recorded in the census as living at Crookhaven Park. If Aberdeen is correct these families were longer term residents of the area rather than the first of those transferred from the estate as Bennett has presumed.

<sup>5</sup> Organ reproduces an account of the missionaries setting up a Christmas tree for the children in 1904 (Organ 1992:15).



extend the reserve lands and further plans were afoot to lease, with a view to purchase, an adjoining block of 133 acres (APB 1908:12), though the latter would never eventuate. It seems the APB had intended to bring new recruits to Roseby Park. Extra cottages were built and in 1907 a group of Aborigines arrived from Echuca in Victoria (Antill 1982:71).

In the first year of its operation as an official government station, some difficulties were reported in instituting management,

Owing to being practically without control for past years, some of the residents are difficult to manage, but there are already signs of improvement, and little (if any) trouble is anticipated (APB 1907:10).

Good progress would be reported the following year,

A small paddock has been under cultivation, and a quantity of maize and potatoes grown. This is the first attempt of the kind. Clearing and fencing have been carried out. ...some (huts) that were grouped too closely (were) removed to more suitable spots.

A considerable improvement is to be seen in the people in many ways - the houses being clean, the children tidy and the general tone of the station raised. Unfortunately, drink is still procurable, though the evil is less pronounced than formerly...Most of the able bodied men work fairly throughout the year, and the young men who work away from the station during the greater portion of the year are given work in the station while out of employment, and paid with rations. The young women are the most difficult problem, as there is no work for them on the station or in the immediate vicinity. The school has progressed satisfactorily, and manual work of various kinds introduced with good results...A garden and experimental plot has also been formed (for the children). (APB 1908:12)

The issues that emerged in this first review were, at base, the same ones that would preoccupy the Board and successive managers over the duration of the life of the

institution: housekeeping, cleanliness, alcohol, training of adults and children, work and economic independence.

The Board's efforts to expand the acreage of the reserve, suggest that it had seriously seen farming as a viable economic activity for the community at the time, but in later years, when it was admitted the land had no farming potential, such activities were clearly pursued by management purely in an effort to effect moral reform upon the residents. In this regard, the Board would be discouraged. Four years after it had been started, the 'Superintendent recommended to the Minister that the scheme be terminated as the Aborigines were indolent and only interested in the five shillings weekly pocket money and the allowances of flour and sugar and had no inclination towards farming or trades work' (Antill 1982:71).

In 1909 he recommended that rations be ceased and residents made to work for wages,

Of the twenty five able-bodied men on the station, some half-dozen have been in constant work, and most of the others have been able to obtain fairly frequent employment, but a few only worked when absolutely necessary. The women have also been able to obtain employment at washing about the district, but the girls will not stay at a place long, and the residents of the locality are in consequence chary of engaging them. The manager expresses his conviction that it would be preferable to expend the money now used for providing rations in establishing industries, and paying wages to the aborigines. Even without any returns, he considers this will tend to make the people independent, while the present system pauperises them (1910:10).

The Board's efforts to civilise the Aborigines entailed the repression of Aboriginal cultural practices. Fink reports on the effects of management policy on the mission near Barwon in western NSW,

Managers on the Mission have discouraged any aboriginal practices which came under their notice – for example, wailing at funerals...The managers of the Mission did their best to imprint upon the children's mind that the

practices of the old people and their parents were primitive and barbaric, and that they must not imitate them. As a result, all the people on the Mission are to-day (sic) ashamed of anything connected with aboriginal life.

They are ashamed if white people see them eating their native foods, and will cover up the food in embarrassment if they are caught unawares, or if they are seen cooking meat in the ashes in the traditional manner (Fink 1957:109).

At Jerrinja, the reference which is used by the elderly to refer to the indigenous language spoken by their parents and grandparents - 'the gibberish' - and the revulsion expressed by an old woman at the thought of eating swan meat, which she had relished when she was younger - leave trace of the methodologies used. Derisory comments and ridicule were directed against such practices, leading them, one could surmise, to be driven underground and interrupting the chain of transmission. The ramifications of these policies on Aboriginal self-esteem and identity will be taken up in Chapter Seven, which deals in detail with the issue of Koori shame. As Reay has shown for north-western NSW (1945:320-321), traditional practices surrounding death and burial were irrevocably altered in this period, although even today, an old woman at Jerrinja expresses her discomfort at not being able to wash the body down, leave it unclothed and stay with it.

Pessimistic about the hopes of reforming the adult Aboriginal population, missionaries and government officials had turned their focus to the 'redemption' of children. Its 1911 Annual Report illustrates the APB's increasing anxiety at the growing population of children of mixed descent, and outlines its preferred strategies for management of the problem,

Of these children, a number who are half-castes, quadroons, and octoroons, are increasing with alarming rapidity. To allow these children to remain on the Reserves to grow up in comparative idleness, and in the midst of more or less vicious surroundings, would be, to say the least, an injustice to the children themselves, and a positive menace to the State. The only solution to the problem, therefore, is to deal effectively with the children; and while not unduly interfering with the relationship between parent and child, to see that

they are properly trained to spheres of future usefulness, and once away from the Reserves not to allow them to return except, perhaps, is the case of those who have parents, on an occasional visit. Past experience has shown that the children cannot be properly trained under their present environments, and it is essential that they should be removed at as early an age as possible to ensure success (APB 1912:2).

The APB saw severing of children from their families as their major hope for a solution to the 'Aboriginal problem'. It would offer a means to remove children from the social networks and influence of kin, to achieve individual indoctrination and reform and was also conceived explicitly as a means of reducing the Aboriginal birth rate (Goodall 1996:120). Despite its urgent representations for legal powers 'in loco parentis' (APB 1907:5), the government resisted the APB's calls, and passed the Aboriginal Protection Act in 1909, without any such provisions. It was not, however, an issue on which the Board was willing to relent, and they doggedly pursued their campaign, 'to be clothed with much fuller powers' (APB 1912:2), until, some six years later, the government finally succumbed.

In the meantime, under the new Act, the Board now held legislatively backed control over all reserves and attendant property, the power 'to remove any aborigine from the vicinity of any reserve, town or township to such distance there from as the Board may direct', (APB 1910:2) and to inspect aboriginal stations and reserves. Offences were created for drunkenness, indecent, insulting and other disorderly behaviour; the police being afforded a vital role in enforcement.

As well as new capacities of control over its charges, the new provisions of the Act showed the Board's preoccupation with patrolling the boundaries between black and white. This was a policy aimed in part, no doubt, at stemming the rising birth rate of children of mixed descent. New provisions were put in place for the laying of charges of entering and trespassing on stations and reserves, wandering with Aborigines and being in possession of Aboriginal blankets.

In 1906, the 'Liquor (Amendment) Act', which prohibited the supply of liquor at hotels to half-castes and others with an admixture of aboriginal blood, had been

brought into force (APB 1907:5). Pointedly isolated from close white settlement, the Board took extra precautions to keep the residents from the vices of the township in the holiday season. Like other Aborigines on 'the Board's books' across the State, the residents of Roseby Park received their annual 'Christmas cheer' - 'consisting of a meat ration and the ingredients of a plum pudding, and in the case of the aged a little tobacco' (APB 1907:2). Accompanyingly, grants were made to enable the organisation of special competitions for station residents during holiday time, the rationale being to keep Aboriginal people from visiting adjoining townships 'where they might be exposed to much temptation' (APB 1907:2).

The Board had become increasingly concerned about classification of Aborigines, making distinctions according to 'degrees of Aboriginal blood'. It was, as demonstrated in its 1910 annual report, pointedly pursuing a policy of forcing those deemed less than 'half-caste' to leave the reserves: 'Quadroons, octaroons, and others with a lesser degree of aboriginal blood will not...be allowed to reside on any station or reserve except by special permission' (1911:3).

By this time, in principle, the Board supplied rations only to the aged, infirm or children. Rations were withheld from the able-bodied who were expected to find employment off the reserve. At times when no outside work was available, the recipients were required to labour on the reserve for their entitlement. The view of rations held by Aboriginal people sometimes diverged sharply from that of the Board and its managers. As the following letter from residents of Cumeroogunga mission to the APB shows, some saw rations as entitlement due to them because of their dispossession from their land,

We humbly state that we consider it very unfair and unsatisfactory that the distribution of rations should be left to the discretion of the Superintendent only. We have always understood that the Government, having dispossessed us of our land, hunting grounds, etc., gave us rations as compensation, without any condition that we should work a certain number of hours for it (cited Thomson 1979:14)

Given the history of ration provisions on the Berry estate and Hay's commitment to maintain rations to certain families even after their transferral, it would be understandable if many at Roseby Park shared similar views. The Board saw it in no such light and deployed their authority over the issue of rations as an instrument of social control.

Putting Aborigines to work was the Board's primary concern, mainly as a measure to instil the work ethic, and to press upon them a sense of economic responsibility. At Roseby Park everyone was impressed with the imperative to work, even children were assigned small tasks and cleaning jobs. Women were sometimes employed as domestics, the Goodnight Island guest house providing one avenue for work. The men found employment labouring on local agricultural farms, on oyster leases or in the fishing industry. Robert Lonesborough recalls,

All the ...old people that was here... When the peas were on, and beans. See 'em going daylight, picking... Well they walked from here... row across, walk from there, way up there, picking peas... Picking corn, picking potatoes... Nearly every old farmer and oyster farmer had old Koories working for them. Ploughing, putting up fences.

There were two (later three) commercial fishing crews who operated out of Roseby Park, maintaining their own rowing boats and equipment.

One was Cheryl's dad, Uncle Dave Carpenter, Sam Connolly, the Noble brothers (Chock and Hugo), and Sam's brothers, sometimes. Then there was Norman Wellington, Cyril Wellington, Gordon Wellington, Uncle Ken Carpenter, Uncle Bill Carpenter... They sewed their own nets. Bark tannined them, wattle bark - I'm sure - in an old galvanised tank. They boiled them up and dipped the nets in.

They fished the river and for days at a time camped out at Jervis Bay, returning to Roseby Park periodically for basic supplies.

## White hostility, Aboriginal exclusion

Aboriginal people were adversely effected during the period of the Great Economic Depression. With so many whites looking for work, employment opportunities for Aborigines were drastically diminished. Ineligible for the receipt of unemployment benefit, many had to turn to the reserves and government rations for survival. In its 1931-1932 annual report the APB reported 'large increases in population (of its Aboriginal Stations), due to the influx of Aborigines who, owing to loss of employment, have been glad to take advantage of the sanctuary provided.' (APB 1932:2). With increasing calls on its limited funding, the APB reported that it had no money to invest in the infrastructure of the reserves and that housing conditions were deteriorating (APB 1932:1).

Meantime, white racist hysteria was escalating. Aboriginal residents and visitors to town, received an unwelcoming reception and were subject to segregation at school, on transport, in cinemas and in other public facilities. Lobbyists increasingly demanded that the government take action to forcibly remove Aboriginal people from townships and confine them on reserves. In 1935, a deputation of Bomaderry citizens presented a signed petition to Shoalhaven Council demanding the removal of Aborigines and 'half-castes' from a local reserve, to an appropriate facility where they 'can be comfortably housed and live decently under appropriate supervision' (Antill 1982:104). The Council wrote to the APB, who replied that efforts were being made to persuade the Aborigines to resettle at Roseby Park, but it later advised that it had no power to force people to do so and called on the Council to use its own health regulations to effect their removal. The Council sent a delegation to inspect the shanty dwellings and on the basis of a health report it was subsequently decided that notices for demolition be served at once on all occupants of these unapproved buildings. By March 1937, the orders had been implemented, all squatters had been removed and temporary structures demolished (Antill 1982:104). It is not known whether the residents shifted to Roseby Park but, as the next example shows, there was generally a strong resistance on the part of the fringe-dwellers about Nowra against institutionalisation.

On the other side of town, a similar battle was being waged to relocate Aborigines to Roseby Park. In this case, Goodall writes, Council found its efforts to effect a removal of Aborigines from a fringe-camp at Worrigeer *opposed* by local employers who relied on Aboriginal labour for the harvesting of their pea and bean crops (Goodall 1996:221). Farmers and APB eventually came to a compromise whereby transport costs to and from Roseby Park would be met by the Board, but, in any event, since they had the support of their employers, the Worrigeer people flatly refused to move and the APB found itself powerless to do anything about it.

These type of frustrations in their efforts to control Aboriginal people lay behind the Board's drive to press state legislators once again for expanded powers. In its 1931 Annual Report their position was spelled out,

The Board, realising the inadequacy of its powers under existing legislation, contemplates seeking certain amendments to its Act, which will enable it to, among other things, concentrate on its Reserves, persons of Aboriginal blood, who are now living on stock routes and alongside of towns and maintain a definite control over them, so that they will not be at liberty to leave without permission (APB 1932:2).

The Board considered that its aims, to 'concentrate' the Aboriginal population on a limited number of reserves, and to subject them to strict new regimes of 'disciplinary supervision' (Goodall 1996:194), were stymied without the necessary powers of control. Finding that it's vaunting of the benefits of confinement to both Aborigines and the general community (APB 1935:1) were insufficient to effect the co-operation of government, it resorted to playing on public prejudices and fears. Whipping up hysteria over issues of public health (Goodall 1996:196), it finally forced the government's concession in 1936.

### **Surveillance and 'disciplinary supervision'**

In 1940, the Aborigines Protection Board, increasingly under fire for its draconian attitudes, was replaced by the Aborigines Welfare Board (AWB). Aboriginal political organisations had been campaigning for years to have the Board dismantled altogether



(Goodall 1996:163), however, the response of government was to recognise and address problems presented by arbitrary abuses of power by individual superintendents, while maintaining its commitment to the principle of supervision in general (Morris 1989:127). The AWB launched itself with an optimistic new policy of assimilation. Their policies, it was declared, were aimed at achieving,

the gradual assimilation of aborigines into the general community, special attention being given to each individual aboriginal family and their suitability for assimilation by virtue of education, training and personal qualities (AWB 1940:1)

The Board saw itself as working 'to educate the dark-skinned people so that they will be able eventually to adjust themselves to the white man's way of life (AWB 1945:2) and to make them into 'responsible, active and intelligent citizen(s) (1948:3), in anticipation of the day,

when aboriginal and white will live together happily and harmoniously as an example to the world of how, by liberal and wise administration, this social problem can be solved (AWB1948:3).

In methodology, the Board placed its faith in the 'pedagogic regime', with the exemption certificate, introduced in 1943, acting as the carrot which would propel people to self-regulation and reform. The restrictions afforded on them by the Dog Act, as the 1943 amendments had come to be known, are the subject of strong and bitter memories amongst Jerrinja people today.

Foucauldian insights on the microphysics of power critical to the 'carceral' institution - its detailed controls on body, space and time, the centrality of surveillance, the creation of regimes of truth and knowledge, the production of the subject - enlighten our perspective on the workings of the Aboriginal institution. At Roseby Park, movements of Aboriginal people on and off the reserve were heavily regulated and there was a complete prohibition on whites entering the mission. Gwen Reid recalled,

It was like a prison camp. They had us all fenced in. There was a ramp and gate where the signs are. A turnstile and a lock and key on the gates<sup>6</sup>. If you went out you had to tell them where you were going. People who lived outside in town and that...if anyone came to visit us, they had to go and see the managers. Report to the managers at 9am and leave by 6pm.

People's comings and goings were subject to careful surveillance, and even when the manager was not physically present, the sense of being observed acted as a strong deterrent to transgression,

See the road used to come up there and as you come up toward the mission house, he used to have his boundary but he could see everything that's going on, he used to be on his verandah, because the road used to come up...it used to come straight up the road, straight along, so that he could see everything, he could see you coming up the road, who was coming up the road, and who was coming in and who wasn't going out...He was on the verandah all the time, and he'd come around, walk around the mission...

Careful written account of presences and absences were kept.

As on other reserves across the state, considerable effort was expended by the administration in practices of survey and correction. The inculcation of habits of cleanliness continued to be seen as a crucial task in the process of 'domestication' of the Aborigines at Roseby Park. Home inspections, which denied Koories privacy and self-determination, were a source of humiliation and anxiety. Mal Cooper recalled,

You used to see the women... I can remember my mother and the other people, getting down on their hands and knees and scrubbing their floors just because the manager was coming. You know them old houses...I used to see poor Edie's mother doing it. I was only a young fella about ten...you'd go along... and they'd be all scrubbing their houses, or they used to go out and get clay and do all they chimneys up inside, whiten it all up, clean it all up.

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<sup>6</sup> Others have reported that the reserve was never fenced.

People were not always obsequious in the face of the criticisms and directives issued them. In a station report for 1948, the Matron recorded that she had inspected 14 dwellings on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March. She went on to report two instances of 'insubordination', one of a husband who had 'retorted rudely' when his wife was asked to keep her home clean, the second when a woman had been 'insubordinate when appealed to observe rules of hygiene' (NSW AWB Station Reports and Returns 1947).

The scope for such acts of subversiveness were limited, when recourse was available for police involvement, and when charges of uncleanness and unhygiene could be wielded to threaten, or justify, the removal of children. Later, Helen Hambly visiting Roseby Park, recollected seeing mothers cry when it rained. On asking why, she was told:

Well if the children get all muddy and dirty coming home, there's no way I can get those clothes washed and clean for them to wear to school in the morning and if it happens too often, she wouldn't say it, but I knew it, that if she didn't send her children to school, they were taken away and made domestic slaves (cited Phelps 1989:32).

A woman at Jerrinja recalls, 'Well there was a lot of that, some of the kids, well the welfare. Well I suppose you couldn't blame the welfare. Kids wouldn't go to school. Used to play truant, go and hide in the bush...'

### **'Free spaces' - resisting dominant imperatives**

Women, of course, faced an uphill battle to keep houses and bodies clean in the poor, tiny, overcrowded and rundown shacks which were, for many years, without running water and ablution facilities. Robert Lonesborough remembers,

You only had tank water and when the droughts were on... There was a well down over at Orient Point, you had to row around there with your clothes, covers (?) and what have you. Sometimes they wouldn't worry about the

clothing just carry them over the hill. All the women from up here'd be over there. They'd all go and make it one big party, see. It was like a spring that would rise and fall with the tides. Dry weather, you could see them carrying their water home, across. 'Was the only way to get water, tanks were all dry.

Such shared hardships brought the women together in solidarity, creating an arena for communal social gatherings.

Men had their own arenas for sociality. Under the prevailing legislation, Aboriginal people were prohibited from the purchase and consumption of alcohol, unless issued with a certificate of exemption. Drinking was, however, in spite of, and perhaps because of, its illicitness, a popular form of recreation amongst the men, who often retreated into the bush to do so. Gwen Reid recounts,

Well like those blokes they didn't drink like they do today on the mission there. When they used to get the grog, that's when they used to have them, well they really had to have dog licence then. It was only so many of them that had it, that could walk into a hotel. Well when they used to hit the grog, well they wouldn't come on the mission, they used to drink in the camps and that in the bush...

Robert Lonesborough recalls two-up rings in the bush behind the mission, 'Oh, this penny throwing...They'd get wild and throw the pennies away. Then they'd have a fight.' As Morris has argued, in the face of domination people sought to create 'free' spaces where a degree of autonomy could be exercised (Morris 1989:143). In this way they created arenas for the practice of sociality, on their own terms, while snubbing the authority and expectations of the regime.

The major preoccupation of management remained the making of its charges into productive members of the labour force. To some extent their task was inhibited by external factors. In his 1956 study, Bell showed that fluctuations in the populations of Roseby Park and other stations were always closely synched with the changing fortunes of the general Australian economy. Economic upturns and other periods of high demand for labour, especially the war years, were closely correlated with falls in

the reserve populations, but as soon as there was a downturn in the economy, when unemployment in the general community reached significant levels, the populations of the reserves would rise correspondingly. The reserve populations served as a reserve army of labour for the mainstream economy; when work was scarce and Aboriginal people faced competition from whites, they were always the first to miss out (1956:181-186). Racism, as he showed, also impacted heavily on the work opportunities for Aboriginal men and women on the south coast in that period.

Even when work was available, however, Aboriginal involvement in the labour market did not conform to white expectations. Although some people speak proudly of their ancestors diligent work habits, records suggest the majority were not interested in permanent employment, that they sought neither to maximise their income or to produce a surplus which could be saved to secure them against future shortfalls. In the station report of 1948, the Matron complained that the senior girls were generally indifferent about accepting work when it was available and that they would not remain in positions found for them, leaving their employers without notice and for no apparent reason. In 1948, the station manager expressed his frustration thus:

At the close of a year's work here on this station, both the Manager and Matron are distressed at the lethargy, laziness, indolence, and ungratefulness of the Aborigines. It seems that the more is done, the more is expected and yet something must be done for them. I am persuaded that no progress can be expected until the station is brought into closer contact with white people and the Board adopts a much firmer policy in regard to the enforcement of the adults to continual employment. I doubt if the average income of the best family on this station (excluding the Handymen) would exceed L2,10.0 per week (NSW AWB Station Report 1948).

While drinking as an act of defiance and subversion of bourgeois sensibilities<sup>7</sup> (see Fink 1956, Beckett 1964, Cowlshaw 1988) served to create 'free' space ironically, I would argue, the greatest potential for creating 'free' spaces came through an apparent

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<sup>7</sup> I will give broader consideration to the practice of drinking at a later point.

conformity to the exhortation to work. The commercial fishermen were able to escape the rigours of reserve life for the quiet autonomy of Jervis Bay, where they camped and fished for days on end, returning to the mission only from time to time to replenish their provisions. Mal recalls, 'Them days, we were free and happy.' As Morris has noted, the compulsion for children to attend schools, fettered Aboriginal movement on the north coast (1989:36). Likewise here, women and children were only able to join these bayside camps during holiday season.

There were other forms of employment which provided an escape from supervised life, without reducing people to isolated individualism, forestry work, clearing and crop harvesting to name a few. There was considerable picking work to be had locally, but taking work further afield allowed people to free themselves from the reserve for months at a time, to travel the countryside and to meet Koories from other places. In the prime seasons, farmers from the far south coast would send their trucks to recruit labourers from Roseby Park, with families usually returning year after year to work for the same employers. Crop picking was one of the few employment opportunities in which women could take part. Shirley Connolly recalls,

We used to go picking down the coast, whole tribe of us went, when I was young. When I was five or six I used to help do a bit of picking. They used to have a big cattle truck with a big canvas. We used to all pile in there. A lot used to go, down Bodalla and Bega. We used to stay on farms. They had shacks and that. Tin shacks.

The picking camps provided an exciting social environment, where people were gathered from wide areas. Big monies could be earned, and more often lost, in the large gambling schools which proliferated amongst them (Bell 1956:194). When the season was over, those from Roseby Park returned to the mission, to resume life as before.

## Policy shifts - toward dispersal and assimilation

The earlier AWB reports tended to place the greater burden of blame on colour prejudice for the failure of assimilation policies, and called for greater tolerance on the part of whites. At this stage, the need for reform on the part of aborigines was being expressed in benign pastoral tones. Aborigines, the Board maintained, needed help to appreciate the value and responsibilities of white civic society (AWB 1945:6, 1948:3). The Board saw it as its task 'to build up a sense of responsibility, and in place of a previous aimless existence, to establish through education and training a desire to become more desirable members of society' (AWB 1947:3).

By the 1950s, a note of strain in respect of Aboriginal attitudes was being sounded. The Board reported that aboriginal people were being 'led to understand and appreciate' amongst other things the value of 'a proper relationship to the social and cultural life of the community to which *they should* aspire to belong. (AWB 1952:3) (emphasis added). The Aborigine it was noted needed to '*prove...his independence, moral responsibility and reliability*' (1949:3) (emphasis added); 'whites as well as coloured people have to learn the meaning of tolerance and forbearance, and each must do his best to help the other' (AWB 1952:3).

By the mid '50s, growing exasperation with their charges was tipping the balance from blame on white prejudices clearly in favour of Aboriginal negligence. 'The greatest barriers,' the AWB wrote in 1953, '*...lie in the apathy and lack of initiative on the part of the great majority of aborigines, and the prejudice of the white community and its reluctance to fully accept them...*' (AWB 1953:3), however, in the same report it noted that 'colour prejudice...does not appear to play a very prominent part in this matter...' (AWB 1953:3). In 1960, the reproach of whites would be significantly muted, it being reported that 'prejudice (was) rapidly dying', being confined only to a few country centres (AWB 1960:9). In comparison, there were strong words of reproach, for Aboriginal people,

aborigines and persons with an admixture of aboriginal blood, can do more to improve their living standards by applying money to the necessities of their families and homes instead of squandering it in gambling and other

useless and wasteful avenues, including drink (1960:9).

Increasingly under siege from the 'extravagant' (AWB 1960:9) claims of liberal critics of government policy, the AWB's defended itself by pointing out that in NSW at the time, with the exception of access to alcohol, aborigines enjoyed rights almost identical to those held by whites (1960:9). It rallied that the government should not be expected to sustain indefinitely – and at great expense - aborigines

living together in artificial groups on the principle that the State owes them such an existence, especially those in whom aboriginal blood is in the minority (1961:11)

It once again pressed the opinion that Aborigines must shoulder a good portion of the blame. Stuck in a thorny position the AWB volunteered,

It is difficult for a welfare authority to decide how critical it should be of those committed to its care. The Board recognises the psychological and emotional disabilities of a small minority group whose mode of life provides few opportunities for self-improvement by participation in social and community organisations or by the example set by others around them...many accept their lot as inevitable and cling pathetically to the surroundings that have offered them so little in employment or opportunity.

But nothing can be achieved without some effort of self-help...(1961:12)

By the end of the 1940s, the Board had become increasingly inclined to agree with the station manager's earlier prognosis. It considered that the isolation of Roseby Park from the mainstream, constituted an obstacle to 'progress', and was highly critical of Aboriginal tendencies for 'clinging together in groups' and 'segregating themselves among their own kind' (NSWAWB cited Goodall 1996:265). Acknowledging that, when established, the remote location of Roseby Park had been in keeping with then policies to 'isolate the aborigines from the white communities as far as possible' (AWB 1950:6), but declared, now, that the settlement's isolation from town and village centres, from sources of employment, social, recreational and medical



facilities made the place 'unsuitable for retention as a modern station settlement' (AWB 1950:6).

In 1950 the Board made public its intention to close Roseby Park down,

The Board hopes that as funds are available for the erection of houses in Nowra, a number of families will become absorbed into the general community and that in the not too distant future it will be possible to close this station (AWB cited Fox u.d.:31.3).

In the opinion of the Board, the residents of Roseby Park Station, could, with encouragement, take their places in the life of the general community and the proposals which have been made will give them the necessary opportunity (AWB 1950:7).

During the 1950s, the land surrounding Roseby Park began to be taken up and developed by whites, initially for holiday homes, but gradually for more permanent settlement. In its report for 1957, the AWB expressed its anticipation that the residents of Roseby Park would be subsumed into the newly emerging non-Aboriginal community,

This is one of the Board's smallest Stations...There is a growing white settlement adjacent to the Station and it is anticipated that eventually it will be possible to absorb the Station residents into the local community. Some white children attend the school on the Station, and this assists the process of assimilation (AWB cited Fox u.d. 31.3).

Because it was resolved to close Roseby Park, the Board was reluctant to expend any moneys on the place and living conditions, already poor, deteriorated. In a 1961-1962 report it was noted,

The sixteen cottages of Roseby Park, all of which were in extremely poor condition, had been built in 1933 and housed 129 Aborigines. They had no bathrooms or washing facilities, there being only one tap in the kitchen

connected to a rainwater tank outside, and not even ablution blocks were provided (NSW AWB Aboriginal Stations and Reserves Report 1961-62 cited Phelps 1989:25).

In 1961 and 1962, health inspectors from Shoalhaven Council called for improvements in all the dwellings and recommended to the AWB that bathing and washing facilities be installed. In late 1963, however, these improvements had not been effected, four huts were designated totally unfit for human habitation and the rest were found to have weather-proofing problems, inadequate lighting and ventilation, cracked and broken windows, rotten weather and floor boards, holed and cracked asbestos cement and still no suitable facilities for cooking, bathing and washing (Phelps 1989:32).

In correspondence to Shoalhaven Council, the AWB advised that it was 'anxious to see Aborigines wherever possible, placed in houses scattered throughout the country towns rather than in group settlements' (Phelps 1989:30). This policy of 'peppercotting' was conceived as a measure which would break up the Aboriginal propensity to congregate and create greater pressure for conformity, not least through the sense of constant oversight it would engender (Goodall 1996:267).

In 1962, Shoalhaven Council established an Aboriginal Welfare Committee. One of its first tasks was to conduct an investigation into housing in the fringe camps of Nowra and on the local reserves at Roseby Park and Wreck Bay. Council found the conditions of living in the fringe camps appalling, but at Roseby Park, despite its above-mentioned official complaints to the AWB it reported, 'The houses were old and lacked amenities, but most of the menfolk were in regular employment and all families were happy with their present conditions' (cited Antill 1982:237).

Following its investigations, the Council wrote to the AWB, volunteering to make two house sites available in Bomaderry for Aboriginal housing, if the AWB provided the materials, and also promising to organise construction. The AWB took up the offer and the project was brought to completion (Antill 1982:2327). There must have been some cause for irritation on the part of Council, however, when the time came for allocation of the homes, for rather than awarding the homes to families living in

desperate conditions at the Brown's Flat or Worrigee shanty towns, preference was given to families from 'a reserve'. AWB explained that the homes must be provided to 'suitable' families, who realised 'the importance of caring for the dwelling' (Shoalhaven Aboriginal Welfare Committee 1963 cited Phelps 1989:31),

These people (from the reserve), who had, to some extent conformed with authority, could not be passed over for those which were undoubtedly living under worse conditions at places such as Worrigee but who were apparently reluctant to conform with authority (Shoalhaven Aboriginal Welfare Committee 1963 cited Phelps 1989:31).

The families awarded the homes were from Roseby Park. Several families moved off the mission in this period. In 1964, in a measure which may have been aimed at encouraging resettlement, the reserve school was closed and the twenty students were forced to travel each day to distant Nowra. Jeremy Long visited Roseby Park at this time, as part of his survey of Aboriginal settlements. He reported on the inconvenient location of the reserve for schooling, employment and shopping, and suggested,

If the existing houses were handed over to the present tenants to maintain and improve themselves, and at the same time new houses were acquired or built and offered for rental or purchase in Nowra, the present overcrowding might be moderated, as those who wanted better and more conveniently sited housing moved out...Suitable new houses might well be provided on the station for the three elderly couples and two pensioned widowers should they wish to remain (Long 1970:56).

The Board was now firmly committed to a policy of assimilation, its intention to see Aboriginal people merged, to the point of invisibility, into the general community. The new aim of government was clearly expressed at a joint conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers on Native Welfare in 1961,

that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the

same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians (Gale and Brookman 1975:72).

Since its intention was to close Roseby Park, the Welfare Board offered no objections when Shoalhaven Council sought revocation of part of the reserve for a road in 1960 (Phelps 1989:33)<sup>8</sup>. The road was signal of the escalating development of the area. Where many reserves had been lost to Aboriginal people, in earlier decades of the twentieth century, under the pressure of demands for pastoral lands and town expansions, Roseby Park had been saved by its relative isolation and by the poor farming potential of the land. In the 1950s and through the 1960s, however, the potential for tourism and holidaymaking in the area was beginning to be realised, and the building of holiday and retirement homes, as well as permanent dwellings, rapidly transformed the bush and pastoral surrounds of the reserve into urban landscape.

### **The end of reserve management**

In keeping with its shift in focus away from reserves, the Board had begun to develop a network of District Welfare Officers whose duties were to oversee the transition of Aboriginal people into the mainstream. In his survey of Roseby Park in the mid 1960s, Long noted that the Board planned to broaden the manager's duties making him an assistant welfare officer responsible for Nowra and the broader district. Although he would still be based at Roseby Park his time there would be significantly reduced, a change, Long commented, that was likely to pass largely unnoticed, since 'the station people appeared to be little dependent on the manager...Probably rather more drastic changes could be made without any real ill-effects.' (1970:56). The Board apparently did move quickly in more drastic directions and in 1966 the management at Roseby Park was permanently withdrawn (Phelps 1989:33).

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<sup>8</sup> The land area of the reserve had already been diminished with the revoking of the foreshore areas, which reduced the total acreage from 67 to 56 acres (Egloff u.d.: 12).

## **The management era in Jerrinja memory**

Memories of physical and economic hardship and deprivation - poor, overcrowded housing, limited food supplies, poverty and lack – characterise Jerrinja people's recollection of the management era and, in their shared experience provide grounds for ongoing solidarity. 'Good old days,' says Robert Lonesborough, 'good for nothing (What do you mean?) Well it was a hard life. You didn't have the things you got today. These kids are in heaven and they don't know it.' Such tales of lack are often offset by the sentiment that in those days, everyone helped each other, and that, back then, people were happy with little. Dorothy Reid recalls nostalgically the improvisations born of poverty, 'in our days we used to use tussock grass for pillows and corn bags for blankets...We used to make our rods out of cotton reel and oak sticks.' Some approvingly contrast the hard work of the past, with the indolence of the present. 'These blokes wouldn't dig a carrot now. Wouldn't know how to dig a potato. Aah, pretty active. These blokes are active this way (motions drinking)'.

It is clear that throughout the period, while Aboriginal people subsisted in part on rations and store provisions bought with wages, these were not sufficient to supply all their food needs. Robert Lonesborough recalls the rations provision, 'There'd be sugar, tea, rice, flour. The meat would be once a month. You'd smell meat cooking everywhere. Grilling it on the coals.' Despite complaints that they received only the off cuts that whites didn't want, ration meat supplies were relished, but also quickly exhausted. People invariably turned back to the produce they harvested themselves, sometimes from the bush, but especially from the sea, to sustain themselves through the month. Gwen Reid recalled chasing rabbits with a bundi stick and the gathering of mushrooms, while Nancy Campbell describes traditional techniques for hunting swan. Fishing, diving and collecting seafood, meanwhile, continued to produced the mainstay of their diet; the familiar sight of 'stack of shells (signalling a metre in height) everywhere around the place' being vividly recalled.

Images of prison and slavery are recurrent themes in Jerrinja people's recollections of the mission management period, poignantly capturing the sense of confinement and control, loss of freedom and the racist foundations of the dominating regime.

Managers and matrons had broad-sweeping powers over most aspects of everyday life

and, if their authority was not sufficient, there was always ample back-up. As Nancy Campbell recalls, 'If you didn't do what you're told, they'd have the police on you'.

The application of the Boards' policies had depended, of course, on the individual functionaries, primarily the managers and matrons, who worked on the ground. There was always scope for differences in personality and temperament - the government itself taking measures to reign in autocratic personalities from time to time - and for flexible or rigid interpretation. The various managers at Roseby Park are remembered by the residents for their particular personality styles, the helpful ones, the harmless and the bastards. 'The people we had here were nice', one woman says. The managers' help in building homes and in undertaking repairs about the mission, in driving people about, taking them to the doctor's, in giving advice - on amongst other things, as one man recalls in glee, on how to evade taxes - are appreciatively recalled. Gwen Reid recalled that one of the early managers lost his eye while working on her grandparents' home.

Unanimously, the manager who is judged worst was an Aboriginal man, Ridgeway. No doubt his Aboriginality constituted an instant problematic - heightening the sense of 'Who is he to boss us around?' Whatsoever, whatever his personal predilections, an Aboriginal person would always have felt himself, and been given less leeway in implementing the letter of the law. That rifts between centre and periphery sometimes developed when staff took the side of their charges against the Board's position, is demonstrated in the sharp rebuke directed to a station manager's 'rude letter' criticising the inadequacy of facilities at Roseby Park (NSW AWB Stations and Reserves Report 1948).

There is, I would note, for all the pain that attends memories of those days, a certain censorship in force, so that an elderly person who begins to intimate a nostalgic fondness for bygone days may find themselves cut short with pointed reminders that those were the dark and terrible days of Aboriginal oppression.

Whatever their sympathies for certain managers, there also clearly developed, by virtue of their shared experiences of oppression, a strong sense of anti-authoritarian solidarity amongst Roseby Park residents. Even families now deeply in feud, will

retell with relish the past escapades of their antagonists in flaunting or undermining the authority of managers and police. There are also clear lines of distinction drawn between black and white, the stereotypes of whites emphasising their cruelty, cunning, greed, individualism and racist superiority.

There are many painful and bitter memories of white discrimination and abuse directed against them. Jean recounts,

We were sorta protected there on the mission. 'course when I was a kid there used to... oh and grown up too...I always found that bit of prejudice in town, you know, when you'd go into the town. Yeah. Even after I was married we still used to feel it, you know...Well they wouldn't accept you in the picture theatres, you'd be cast aside to sit somewhere else. You couldn't sit where the white people were. And many times you'd go into a shop and they'd serve others first before they served you, even if you was, you know...[NK: First in line]. Yeah...and that used to hurt too, sometimes.

Further examples and a discussion of the fallout from these types of prejudices will be taken up in Chapter Seven which deals with the phenomenon of shame.

### **The birth of the Jerringa Tribal Council**

Traditions of Aboriginal political opposition to social injustice were hardly novel in Australia but, spurred by anti-colonial movements across the globe, and by the black pride movement in the United States, they found new force in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, the birth of a new political consciousness at Roseby Park was instigated with the establishment Jerringa (sic) Tribal Council, under the lead of Jack Campbell<sup>9</sup>, although not everyone was sympathetic, some strongly disconcerted by what they saw as a dangerous or crazy radicalism. According to Fox, this development at Roseby Park was preceded by the visit to the community of Aboriginal activist Frank Roberts; the issues he pressed being readily identified with

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Campbell was a Dhan-gadi man who had married into the Wellington family.

by Campbell who promptly joined forces with the then independent NSW Aboriginal Land and Rights Council (Fox u.d.:31.5).

While further families were enticed off the mission, during the 1970s, into homes in town built under the Housing for Aborigines scheme (Fox u.d.:31.3), some twenty five years after the government had announced its intention to close the reserve, others were still consciously resisting pressures to do so, demanding that new homes be built for them on the reserve. Jack Campbell led a rent strike and as a result of this, and other lobbying efforts, was successful in securing a large allocation for new housing from the Whitlam government. The Jerringa Tribal Housing Company was established, to administer the construction project and, by 1976, twenty new homes had been built on the Roseby Park Reserve. Memories of an official ceremony conducted by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in which ownership of the houses was pledged in posterity to their owners are strongly etched in the memory of Jerrinja residents. At this time, several of the families who had taken up housing in Nowra and Bomaderry returned to the community.

### **Battles over land - the sporting field dispute<sup>10</sup>**

In the early 1970s, a dispute erupted between the Jerringa Tribal Council and Shoalhaven Shire Council when work commenced on the establishment of public sporting facilities on a portion of land at Crookhaven Heads. Under Jack Campbell's leadership, the Koories protested that a burial ground, and other sites of traditional significance, would be effected by the development and that one site had already been destroyed with the earlier construction of tennis courts. Moreover, they asserted that, both under traditional and European law, the Jerrinja were the rightful owners of the land.

The dispute quickly escalated, the Jerrinja finding allies in the South Coast Labour Council, who instituted work bans over the site. A protest camp, no doubt inspired by the recent and potent symbolism of the Canberra tent embassy, was set up on site. For some time the development remained stalled but, in 1977, the Council, resolving to

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<sup>10</sup> The following account relies on the carefully documented history of the dispute written by Terry



pursue the project, recruited non-union labour to recommence work. They faced bitter opposition. Further negotiations were attempted but the Jerrinja found reason to question Council's *bona fides*.

In 1979 during a visit to Roseby Park by the NSW Parliament's Select Committee on Aborigines, Jack Campbell reported on the still ongoing dispute with Council,

...We had to go and sit on the land down here in tents to stop more desecration occurring. The Council played tactics of hit and run all the time. We had to go to the unions for support. The unions came and put up tents, they put an embassy out there and we sat there for three months until everything quietened down. The unions supported us and gave us food. It costs the Aborigines nothing. I was very proud to see the work that the unions put into this place. I asked them to put a freeze and green ban on this land, which they did, and that green ban still stands. In about Christmas of 1977, the council sneaked in and put amenity blocks on a woman's place. That is one place a man is not allowed to go, it belongs to the women. There was only three of the women who used that up until it was desecrated (cited Fox u.d.:31,19).

Two new developments had shifted the dispute to a new plane. In 1978, in an assertion of traditional rights and pre-empting the institution of NSW land rights legislation, the Jerrinja Tribal Council submitted a land claim over the Roseby Park reserve and remaining Crown land in the vicinity, including the proposed sporting site. Around the same time, the National Parks and Wildlife Service intervened, proposing, after consultation with traditional owners, that the area be afforded some protection by being formally gazetted as an 'Aboriginal Place'. Whipped up by inflammatory leafletting and press editorials, there was considerable hysteria from local white residents, who mobilised in opposition holding public meetings and establishing a community committee. Accusations were made of attempts to divide the community when one long term Aboriginal resident of the area spoke up - in terms which since the Hindmarsh case have now become familiar - to deny the existence of any sacred sites.

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Fox, who participated in the events as a supporter of the Jerrinja Tribal Council (Fox u.d.).

In 1981, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that in protest at racial abuse directed at them at the local primary school, 35 out of 47 students from Roseby Park had been withdrawn from class by their parents (cited Fox u.d.:31.30). Animosities reached their peak when, in July 1982, the Mayor of the Shoalhaven burnt a replica of the Aboriginal flag, subsequently,

...justifying his action saying that, just as all Australians have only one flag which is a symbol of their equality, so all Australians, white or Aboriginal, should have the same, equal right to gain land title - not by land claim but by purchase on the open market (Fox u.d.:31.31).

The dispute was still raging when Jack Campbell passed away in 1983. In the same year the NSW Parliament passed the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act. The Act established a three tiered structure of land councils, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, regional councils under the umbrella of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. The Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council was established under its provisions. Ownership of the old reserve land and of the homes then vested in the Jerringa Tribal Housing Company were transferred to the new Land Council.

The long running dispute was finally brought to a close when, having resubmitted their claims for Crown and reserve lands at Crookhaven Heads, the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council reached agreement with the State Government that 83 hectares of land, including 45 hectares from the Crookhaven Park recreation reserve would be granted to them. The remainder of the reserve would be retained under the trusteeship of Shoalhaven City Council with Jerrinja representation on the management committee.

For many years after its establishment, there was little practical distinction between the constitution and interests of the Jerrinja community and the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council. The LALC worked to secure and administer funding for community projects, submitted claims for land under the NSW legislation and served as a point of reference for the community's interests in respect of government, developers and other parties. The LALC office was housed in the old school house

and although membership was officially defined in broader terms, in practice it was confined to Jerrinja residents and selected kin and countrymen. The election of officebearers and staff appointments were controlled by prominent individuals and families with strong numerical representation on the mission, an issue subject to growing disgruntlement.

Such de facto congruency was seriously jarred, however, when in 1994 an administrator was appointed to oversee the operations of the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council. Amongst her briefs was a directive to open up membership to the broader, legally defined constituency of the LALC, which made no distinction between residents of local origin and recent arrivals to the area. She removed the headquarters from the mission, appointed a co-ordinator from Greenwell Point and instituted a system of council meetings alternating between public meeting places at Huskisson and Culburra. At this point it could be readily contemplated that majority membership and leadership of the JLALC could potentially be held by 'outsiders'. Threats from the administrator that Jerrinja residents could be evicted from their homes for non-payment of rent, brought the reality of their alienation from control over land and asset management to the fore.

In the meantime, the Mabo decision and the passing of the Native Title Act presented new responsibilities and opportunities for the land council, as well as substantial challenges to its authority, as alternative claims for representation, based exclusively on traditional ownership, emerged.

## **Conclusion**

This historical overview has traced the shifts in official protection and welfare board policies as they played out at Roseby Park. Aborigines who had, in the nineteenth century, largely been left to their own devices and *ad hoc* intervention on the part of missionaries and private landholders, became in the twentieth century a 'problem' which must be managed through government intervention. Segregatory measures, originally couched in terms of protection, were increasingly driven by white racist panic and by new perceptions that the reform of the Aboriginal individual could best be achieved within an institutional context. Successive legislative changes

undermined Aboriginal freedom of movement, association and family integrity, while the institutional regime, with its minute interventions and surveillances, sought to remake the Aboriginal mentality. Assimilationary policies envisaged the dispersal and rapid disappearance of Aboriginality within frames of homogenous citizenship.

This account has touched upon, but has not been able, within the limits of this thesis, to fully explore the complex array of forces which forced Aboriginal people to the margins and institutionalised them there. The Aborigines Protection Board and the Aborigines Welfare Board had powerful tools directly at their disposal which gave them leverage to affect their aims, their control over reserve land, their ability to supply and withhold rations and later their authority over children and adult movement. Aboriginal alienation from country had, of course, deprived many Aborigines of any place to go other than reserves. Even in cases where they had maintained some independent existence, they were generally at one point or another forced to seek ratification for their occupation of land from the Government and if approved, were then placed in positions of subordination. Aboriginal exclusion from broader welfare entitlements also made them beholden to institutional control.

The powers of the APB and the AWB were, of course, legally sanctioned and they relied substantially on the police and courts for enforcement. Beyond the provisions of the various Protection Acts and amendments, Aboriginal people found themselves falling foul of a whole gamut of minor offences, the application of the laws sometimes amounting to a type of harassment aimed, as Goodall has suggested, at effecting *de facto* curfews and exclusions from towns<sup>11</sup>. The hegemonic force of the law, schools, church and other institutions all served to define Aborigines as deviant and in need of correction.

The exclusionary force of white prejudice and racism amongst the general public, frequently translated into government action, physically and emotionally marginalised Aboriginal people. Experiences of segregation, racially based violence and abuse, racist lobbies, discrimination in employment and the provision of services, acted to

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<sup>11</sup> Recall Al's recollections in the story of 'Ruthy's Verandah' of his being picked up by the police when he was 'doing nothing wrong' and asked whether he would prefer to be charged with a language or drinking offense.

limit people's desire for mainstream interaction and reinforced their confinement to marginal spaces.

Morris has compared Aboriginal stations to what Goffman (1961) has called the 'total institution' and, to what more recently, Foucault has called the 'carceral'. Morris effectively applies these analytical tools to the case of the Bell Brook and Burnt Bridge Aboriginal stations (1988, 1989). There are limitations, however, I would argue, on the extent to which one can apply Goffman's notion of the 'total institution' to the Aboriginal reserves under protection and welfare management. The mortification of the inmate of the total institution, Goffman argues, arises from his alienation from the set of 'stable social arrangements (of) his home world' (1997: 53) and the stripping away of those things which provide him with his identity - his name, his relationships and social standing, his property and his ability to hold himself in ways - both bodily and relational - which accord him with his sense of self and self respect.

The case of the Aboriginal reserve presents a different situation. Certainly children removed from their families and incarcerated in institutions were to a much greater extent subject to such radical de-selfing, but on the reserves generally the management never achieved the type of totalising power which is entailed here. It is certainly true that some of these 'mortifying' effects must have been significant - the damage to self esteem entailed in the loss of freedom of movement, for instance. The significant difference, however, is that Aboriginal people were generally not confined individually, but collectively. Whole families and broader social networks were encompassed within the institution, providing stable alternative frames of reference in which one's identity and an independent outlook on the world could be anchored.

Ironically, the Aboriginal reserves, designed to dismantle indigenous traditions and effect major moral reforms on Aboriginal people served, in significant ways, to insulate and protect indigenous socio-cultural difference and to shore up - but not exhaust - group identity through the creation of a solidarity born of shared oppression.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **'OWNING' YOUR OWN PEOPLE**

*'We've gotta live the blackfella way, we're Koories, can't change it.'*

In opposition to an outside world perceived as hostile and alienating, Jerrinja is home, the space where Jerrinja people live their own world-taken-for-granted, a place of profound familiarity, a zone of relative comfort and security. It is a disjunctive arena, not because it is free from external definitions, hegemonic influences, engagements and dependencies, but because it has internal substance, because it emerges from and sustains a distinctly different indigenous socio-cultural order and historical experience and because it continually demands loyalty to its own logic. It is not a utopia of homogenous and harmonious communality, far from it, however, individuals and families do pursue their own interests and define their own lifestyles and ambitions, with or against a common moral grain. The purpose of this chapter to bring that moral grain to light.

#### **The cat's cradle of kinship**

As an Aboriginal community, it hardly needs saying that kinship provides the prime organising principle for social, economic and political orientation at Jerrinja. The community may be conceived as an intricate network of kin relations, in which individuals are bound, often through multiple affiliations, and in which the ties between serve as guy lines for interaction. The field is not an even one. While it is, in theory, possible to link any one person on the mission to any other by tracing a path through consanguinal and/or affinal ties, in the daily construction of social life and polity some measures of relatedness are considered supreme, others without productive significance, some remain unknown, some unactivated and some vigorously renounced.

In 'Outline of a Theory of Practice', Bourdieu draws an analogy comparing the opposition between theoretical and 'practical' kin relationships with the maps and tracks worn with use.

The logical relationships constructed by the anthropologist are opposed to 'practical' relationships - practical because continuously practised, kept up, and cultivated - in the same way as the geometrical space of a map, an imaginary representation of all theoretically possible roads and routes, is opposed to the network of beaten tracks, of paths made ever more practicable by constant use.' (1977:37)

At Jerrinja, one might literally read the series of well worn trails between households as some sort of map of practical kin relations. Like a cat's cradle, these paths criss-cross the mission, channeling the traffic of people, goods, money, information and political influence. These flows both mark and maintain serviceable kin relationships across households

The best worn paths are traversed frequently, with confidence and ease. The boundaries between such connected households are relatively permeable and fluid. A row between intimately connected households may halt the traffic between them for a certain time, but generally the track is easily reestablished. As Bourdieu suggests, the less a path is trodden the more difficult it becomes to negotiate. Considerable reluctance, apprehension and formality surrounds the approach between households where communication is infrequent, even where close genealogical links pertain.

The short-cut between Sylvia and Valerie's house takes its path through Graham and Frank's yards. To say it is a well worn track is to understate the case. As a resident of Graham's house, I was a constant witness to the ongoing procession flowing back and forth along the track between these four related households. Women pushing prams, tagging toddlers at their heels, young men sauntering, hands in pockets, possies of children, hopeful card players jingling purses of change... It began early, and continued through out the day until late at night, when raucous voices might sometimes disturb your sleep.

At seventy three, Sylvia was still active head of her large and extended family, and for this reason her house remained a focus of activity. Six of her adult children shared her home, five of them having remained single without children, one son had passed away some years ago, while Valerie, Graham and Frank had established households of their own on the mission. Children, grandchildren and great grandchildren made regular pilgrimages to Nan<sup>1</sup> Sylvia's home demonstrating their respect and affection. Sylvia's kin, particularly the younger members, could also expect to benefit from her largesse, or that of the several single aunts and uncles who lived there. Extra guests would often share the evening meal. Sylvia's household constituted another type of resource for the younger women, who could leave their children in the care of their grandmother and great aunts. One great niece had been permanently adopted by Sylvia's daughter, and another would permanently join the household later in the care of a second aunt.

Like her mother, Sylvia's daughter Valerie had a large family and is herself grandmother to a growing number of grandchildren. With a reputation of opening her arms to people, Valerie's is the largest household on the mission. At the time of my fieldwork there were nineteen permanent residents - Valerie and her husband John, four of their seven children, and two spouses, six grandchildren, two of Valerie's nephews and their father (the white ex of Valerie's sister), the de-facto spouse of one nephew, Valerie's MBSD, a teenage girl who had moved away from family problems at home, and in addition, for considerable periods at a time, a distant cousin-in-law as well. Filling the house beyond capacity, household members spilled out into caravans, shacks and, on some nights, old car bodies in the adjoining yard. During the day the place attracted umpteen visitors, who came to sit and talk and watch comings and goings from the verandah, to join a card game or to borrow bread, sugar or sometimes cash.

To understand the particular configuration of trails, the well worn, the newly

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<sup>1</sup> Nan is a reference to grandmother here.



emergent or those receding under the threat of overgrowth, one needs to consider the local structural principles of kinship and relatedness, the particular set of people and the matter-of-fact relations which pertain between them, the individual histories of particular relationships - the efforts, strategies, fortunes and vagaries that have nourished and beset them - and the different contexts in which kin relationships are activated. In the latter respect, the analogy drawn is not sufficient for one must be able to account for contingency, to see how particular relationships, however, tenuous or fractious in daily life, endure and may be foregrounded depending on contexts and goals.

Most Jerrinja households do not function as bounded units of residence, consumption or domestic production. Boundaries are considerably more fluid and are better placed around broader cognatic descent groups distributed over a number of households. Immediate notions of family, relatedness and interdependence are structured about the senior women (grandmothers) and men (grandfathers) who serve as monarchs<sup>2</sup> of extended families, usually distributed over a number of households on or off the mission, and composed of their children, natural and adopted, grandchildren and great grandchildren. The relationships cemented by these apical figures continue to be maintained, at least in the medium term, even when the focal person has passed away. At a broader level these family groups identify and operate as sub-groups of larger family units; reckoned by removing the focal point a further generation. Hence at Jerrinja, during the time of my fieldwork, the dominant family was represented on the mission by four elderly siblings<sup>3</sup> and their families, descendants of two of their three other siblings, who had passed away, who together occupied eighteen of the twenty seven homes. Taking the frame broader more families became incorporated within this single grouping.

As previously noted there are alternative ways, theoretically speaking, in which kinship relationships could be reckoned. Graham, for example, is a member of the Connolly family, which derives its name from his deceased father, Sam, and of which his mother Sylvia (nee Wellington) was then head. Arguably when his father was alive, Sam would have been a major authority figure within the household, but it was

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<sup>2</sup> At Jerrinja there were no surviving elderly couples.

Sylvia who held standing in the broader politic of the community. Through Sylvia, Graham traces his membership to a broader cognatic descent, which links him closely to the families of his mother's siblings and provides his underlying identity as a Wellington (and beyond that as a Bundle). Graham might have reckoned his relationships to others on the mission in different ways. Graham's father Sam has a sister at Jerrinja, with a large family of her own (mostly absent), however, there appears to be no sense of affiliation between Graham and his father's sister and her family and certainly I saw no practical communication between the two families during the year I was at Jerrinja, despite the close proximity of their homes.

The kin reckoning principles here might be explained by the operation of a principle of matrification. At Jerrinja, this is sometimes expressed as the primary organising principle of descent - it was, to give one instance, argued vigorously to me that houses on the mission should only be transmitted from woman to daughter<sup>4</sup> - however, there are certainly cases on the mission where people have derived their principle family affiliations from the father. Women do in fact constitute household heads in a substantial majority of cases at Jerrinja and are highly influential in the organising of family affairs. In explaining this fact the desertion of men does not appear a significant factor, a higher mortality rate amongst them goes part of the way to explain the situation, but as the following case illustrates this is not the only or primary reason. Norman shares a house with three of his grown-up children, and commands the respect of these and his other children on the mission, however, the house that he and his family occupy is always referred to as his daughter Mary's house - it is most likely officially held in her name - and she assumes the major responsibility for household leadership. In the local political situation, the family's right to occupy the house has been extended to the family through Mary's mother, not her father.

The critical principle, at least in the eyes of its members, is the primacy accorded membership of a family with local traditional interests. Norman had married into the community and although Sam was born on the mission, his father had come to

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<sup>3</sup> Three of whom have now passed away.

<sup>4</sup> Sutton concludes that there were no matrilineal land-holding groups in classical Aboriginal society, and that there are none today as far as he is aware (Sutton 1998)

Roseby Park from Victoria. Neither of these men's own affinities to country seemed to play a significant part in the formulation of their descendant's identity. The formations of descent at Jerrinja, then, stand in close accord with the model of post-classical social organisation developed by Sutton (1998).

### **Post-classical social organisation**

From a fine-toothed review of the literature, and drawing on his own understandings, Sutton distils an inventory of forms and principles to which post-classical social organisation generally conforms. He finds the system primarily structured on principles of cognatic descent and identifies the 'surnamed family' as the fundamental unity of polity. Although the word 'family' may be used within Aboriginal English in a variety of senses, its referent here is an exclusive group, membership of which (generally) is derived from mother or father by birth or adoption; must be actively maintained; may involve a degree of choice (since rights are potentially inherited bilaterally); entails ties to particular place/s; and involves certain rights and obligations. Surnames serve as the primary reference to the group, and members may prefer to identify with them, but such names are not indicative of, or requisite to, group membership.

As Sutton has argued this type of family corporation retains continuities with classical clan organisation and is critical in the maintenance and transmission of traditional interests in country. At Jerrinja, the major family, the Wellingtons, trace traditional affiliation to country primarily in their descent from the Bundles and assert their privileged position as the legitimate spokespeople for country<sup>5</sup>. These principles are reflected in the political dynamics of the community, in a situation where local political institutions are dominated, alternately, between different branches of that family. It is a source of ongoing complaint amongst those families that are not affiliated with this group that they are not afforded any say at meetings, rarely hold office-bearing positions and are almost never the beneficiaries of any resources or special programs directed at the community by government or other outside sources which are inevitably channelled through the community's representative bodies -

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<sup>5</sup> The self-definitions of the politically dominant group as a local descent group with exclusive rights of

'they're all the one family, they roll it round amongst themselves.' Such inequities may be acknowledged by leaders of the dominant group but, behind closed doors, they justify it on the grounds that 'their people weren't from here.'

The same principle probably impacts upon the white spouses of Koori residents, who always find themselves roundly abused if they attempt to assert themselves in community forums. Both whites and Koories see it solely as a question of race, but Aboriginal spouses find themselves similarly subject to animosity if they presume to impose themselves on political processes. Although distinctions between 'original people' and 'Johnny come latelies' seem to have been the basis of ongoing tensions and power differentials between the broader descent groups on the mission since its inception, it would appear that the changing political context has heightened the couching of difference in terms of traditional rights of ownership to country.

While membership of the broad cognatic descent group, or of any family, is ascribed by birth, one's acceptance and recognition within the group, one's affective inclusion and one's rights to speak and be heard, are subject to condition that the person has actively maintained their position within the group, has fulfilled obligations and kept oneself in and abreast of the state of things.

A person who has absented themselves from the community and not maintained relationship with family and has failed to concern themselves with group issues will not be freely welcomed back to take part in the determinations and political representation of group interests at a later date. He or she will find themselves coldly treated as an outsider.

One man who has recently tried to reinvolve himself in community politics says that he is considered a foreigner because he left the mission and did his own thing. His relatives accuse him of being a coconut, black on the outside, white within. On one level it is because he has lived a life over many years away from the mission, adopting a substantially mainstream way of life and set of values, but it is, moreover, because he has not maintained his social

connections with the family; as they see it, his rights have been negated by his failure to remain involved and supportive of group interests.

The rights of another man, actually resident on Jerrinja, were questioned in similar vein. 'He was away from the mission for a long time. How can he come back and think he knows things? Say things?' All relationships on the mission are subject to the same test; relatedness can not be assumed, it must be produced and maintained through social action (Myers 1986:17)<sup>6</sup>.

Without making any attempt to give one domain ontological priority over any other - after all it is surely only an analytic exercise which separates them in the first place - it is clear that relatedness is a product of, productive of and integral to the material, social and ideological formations and practices of Aboriginal life, both classical and post-classical. Since I have already briefly sketched features of the social formation, I will turn now to the moral precepts which sustain relatedness at Jerrinja, before highlighting the social practices and aspects of the economic system which simultaneously afford means and motive for the maintenance of kin relations.

### **'Owning your people': the moral economy of Jerrinja**

The moral precept which seems to have most force at Jerrinja and which gives direct expression to the imperative to recognise and protect relatedness, is that one ought to '*own* one's people'. In respect of relationships between human beings, standard English useage confines the word 'own' to the special case of master and slave. Here the connotation is that the slave is reduced to an object, owned by the master, as any other thing. The word 'disown', though it may reflect equivalent notions of ownership underlying other relationships, is generally employed with a different sense and broader applicability. The Macquarie Dictionary definition reads: 'to refuse to acknowledge as belonging or pertaining to oneself; deny the ownership of or responsibility for; repudiate; renounce'. 'Disown', as far as I am aware is not used in Aboriginal English - rather the formulation is 'don't own' or 'doesn't own' - but a

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<sup>6</sup> Myers goes so far as to argue that the production of structures which endure beyond the immediacies of current relations presents a cultural problem for Aboriginal peoples (1986:17).

reversal of the above definition effectively captures the sense of the word 'own' as it is applied in relations with others by Jerrinja.

To 'own' your people and to be 'owned' by others implies an acknowledgement and affirmation of relationship. It entails a sense of belonging, of acceptance, solidarity and of mutual sympathy, care and respect. To say that someone 'owns you' may refer to your acceptance and recognition in a particular relationship or as a member of a group or community. The phrase is used in reciprocal fashion in the evaluation of the allegiances of group members, especially those who do not live at Jerrinja.

Two small children, Eliza and Daniel, who live off the mission with their non-Aboriginal mother, were staying with their grandmother for a few days. They came to pay a visit to their great-aunt Nan, giving her a hug and a kiss. After they left, Nan commented, 'They're good kids. They weren't brought up on the mission, but they 'own' you.'

As noted previously, those who fail to maintain their ties with the community are strongly criticised. To venture into the mainstream is a threat, a potential betrayal, a distancing which negates the relationship, diminishes the opportunity for mutually beneficial interaction and is frequently read as a message that one holds oneself above the rest. A person who lives in or lays claim to life in the outside world, and its values, will be judged on their willingness to 'own their own people' and 'to mix it' with them.

Following a funeral, discussion in the household where I was staying centred around attendances and absences. Relatives who failed to show were criticised as 'thinking white way'. One woman, noting the absence of a great niece, who kept away from the mission at other times too, threatened to ask her 'straight out, if she *owns* us.' 'She wouldn't want to come near me', she added, angrily. Her nephew, she said, was 'a different thing altogether. He always *owned* all his people.'

In the same conversation another woman, Shirley, told the others that she had recently met one of the absent nieces in the street and recalled how she had

addressed the woman by her familiar name. The reply came back, recounted Shirley, affecting a 'proper' English accent, 'My name is Evelyn'<sup>7</sup>.

'One's people' is a reference primarily to one's kin, particularly to the broad cognatic descent group as defined above, but it is sometimes applied to more inclusive groupings such as the community or south coast Koories or Aboriginal people broadly<sup>8</sup>. To 'own your people' has to do with fulfilment of kinship obligations, but it is also bound up with a commitment to an Aboriginal identity, a matter to which I will return later.

The broad imperative to 'own your people' retains within it further moral injunctions, the obligation to help one's people, to show compassion, to share, to offer hospitality, to socialise with them - or at a minimum to maintain social contact by visiting - to show respect, to communicate knowledge and to attend funerals. The precept that they must 'help one another' stands out, along with the maxim that they must not give their elders cheek, amongst those messages that the older people on the mission remember their parents impressing upon them. The same type of sentiment is fostered today. I have not sufficiently investigated the local meanings implied by the phrase 'to help', but it most likely encompasses most of the above-mentioned canons under the notion of being responsive to the needs (and demands) (see Peterson 1993) of other's, including material and information needs (hence the imperative for sharing), social and emotional needs (eg. keeping company or looking after children), needs for physical protection and back-up in fights, needs for moral and political support and the necessity to advance the overall interests of the group. Amongst some Koories the principles are captured in the maxim 'sharing and caring' (c.f. Keeffe 1988, Macdonald 2000a), but at Jerrinja, although the same sentiments are entailed, I did not hear it expressed in that particular double-barrelled formulation.

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<sup>7</sup> The intragroup idiom is a form of Aboriginal English, distinguished by a limited number of lexical items drawn from local indigenous language, local as opposed to standard word meanings, unusual and emphatic variations in the renditions of certain words (eg. *stubbrom* for stubborn), a reduced vocabulary and a distinctive accent

<sup>8</sup> Tonkinson records for the Mardudjara that the term *walydja* ('own') is used to distinguish consanguinal from classificatory kin, but, he says 'that it is not an infallible guide because people sometimes use it with reference to other relatives with whom some special bond is felt but no close blood tie exists' (1978:44).

The moral-legal aspect of sharing and caring and its centrality in forging relatedness, belonging and identity is conveyed in a notable quote from Grandfather Koori in Gilbert's *Talking Black*:

Aboriginality, eh? You say you want your Aboriginality back? That means having rules don't it? And the first two orders of those rules is share and care. I don't care how hard it is. You build Aboriginality, boy, or you got nothing. There's no other choice to it (Grandfather Koori, in Gilbert 1977:300-304).

Macdonald has hypothesised that, amongst the Wiradjuri the 'law of care' was originally the complement within a classical indigenous legal-moral system, to a 'law of justice'. The 'law of care' related to moral principles underlying social practice, while the 'law of justice' was administered through institutions such as religious law and sorcery (Macdonald 2000b:4).<sup>9</sup>

Nurturing children could be seen as the means *par excellence* of exercising one's obligation to take care of others. At Jerrinja, as in all Aboriginal communities, the shared nature of the task serves to bind kin in multiple webs of relatedness. The care of children is never the sole prerogative or responsibility of the parents. Children may temporarily or permanently be in the care of other relatives, most often, but not always, those from the same cognatic descent group. In some cases, at a young age, children may be informally adopted, usually by a woman without children of her own. A material and/or affectionate relationship with the birth mother may or may not be retained. Grandmothers are also significant carers of children, in some cases taking prime responsibility. Even at a relatively young age children often exercise some

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<sup>9</sup> To enter into a brief aside in the light of this suggestion, it is interesting to speculate - without suggesting that men did not exercise the 'law of care' - on whether there might have been any gender specialisation in the two domains. It is well known that the administration of justice through religious law was primarily a men's affair; the idiom of care, on the other hand, has some suggestion of maternal nurturing. To raise a hoary old argument, that initiation ceremonies provided men with a symbolic outlet for mimicking women's procreative powers, might it also be that they provided a symbolic balance to women's role in nurturing social relations, and that while women nourished intergroup relations men were especially concerned with the forging and maintenance of intra-group ties. It has often been noted that with the demise of the order of *law* and religious practice Aboriginal men have suffered a serious decline in authority and status. Women on the other hand have been noted as having retained their authority or perhaps having advanced in status. Could it be that women, as chief keepers of the family and family relationships, have not had to relinquish their important position as prime upholders of the moral order of care?



volition about with whom they choose to stay. They frequently spend the night at other households to enjoy the company of cousins; these form their closest and most frequent companions. Children may protest minor squabbles with parents or siblings by removing themselves from home for longer or shorter periods - 'like if you get in trouble off your parents you run to the other side of the street, to your other side of the family' - or may permanently exit difficult family situations to take up residence in the homes of close or distant kin.

When I moved into the home of Gina and Graham Connolly - and no doubt partly as a result of the fact that I was now occupying one of the bedrooms - their daughters, Angela (8) and Matika (10), were staying most of the time at their paternal grandmother, Sylvia's house. Here they had the attentions of their grandmother and indulgent aunts and uncles and also the company of other cousins. Patricia (7), one of Sylvia's DDD, lived permanently in Sylvia's house and was being raised primarily by her great aunt, Shirley. Gina and Graham and their son Simon often ate their evening meal at Sylvia's house and the girls usually came over to their parents' home to ready themselves for school in the morning.

After their maternal grandmother's home was renovated, the girls moved into separate bedrooms prepared for them there and this grandmother assumed care for their food, clothing and general upkeep. A year later, Angela had moved back to her parents' house, but, says her grandmother, 'she comes up when she gets cranky with the family'. There were sometimes tensions involved in the girl's mobility and choices; their mother sometimes berating them for not spending enough time at home. As well as their own children, Graham and Gina take care of Luke, a young teenager whose mother had begun a new family with another man and whose (his mother) drinking habits disturbed him. Luke is Gina's MMZDDS and Graham's MBDDS and calls them aunty and uncle.

Sharing children sometimes emerges as a moral reaction to a person's lack of opportunity to provide care and their perceived loneliness. Parents support children's residence with a grandmother living on her own as providing needed company. The

couple or woman without children, who risk a major gap in their kinship network, are the objects of pity. Adoption is a common response. Sharing children can also relieve the family struggling with many children. The mobility of children expands and strengthens the children's networks of kin, teaches them who their relations are and creates multiple ties of affection and responsibility. Moreover, sharing children cements the bonds between the families. Barwick also makes the argument that foster-rearing of children encourages adherence to common norms and values by reducing social isolation (1988:28).

### **Sharing and sociality**

The value placed on sharing is the subject of explicit moral enunciations, particularly in the socialisation of children at Jerrinja. As Peterson (1993) has demonstrated, however, one must not assume that concepts such as sharing and generosity have identical meaning from one society to another. In reassessing the ethic of generosity prevalent amongst hunter-gatherers, Peterson demonstrates that, in opposition to Western expectations, sharing takes place in the context of demand, not in the free and 'altruistic' disbursement of gifts. The location of generosity at the point of response rather than of self-propulsion, he argues, makes it no less a moral act and symbol of social relatedness to others but one more compatible with the particular social dynamics, moral imperatives and economic limitations of these small-scale kin based societies (Peterson 1993:870). Jerrinja is, of course, no longer a classic hunter-gatherer society, however, as Macdonald has argued, the ethic of demand sharing has persisted amongst Aboriginal groups in settled Australia, in spite of change, because it was hinged more on a particular mode of distribution, than a specific mode of production (2000b:3). Demand sharing, as Peterson maintains, serves well to mediate the conflicting demands between the desire to maintain autonomy and one's desire and obligations to sustain relatedness.

My own misunderstandings of the concept of sharing in Aboriginal communities provided difficult lessons. Before my experience at Jerrinja, I spent a brief period living in the Central Australian Aboriginal community of Papunya, where I was resident in what was primarily a women's bush camp. Based on my flawed preconceptions of the Aboriginal economy of sharing, as each meal time came

around, I dutifully doled out portions of my food supplies to my companions, expecting some reciprocal returns. I was to be disappointed. As a result of another major misapprehension, concerning the state of banking facilities at Papunya, and exacerbated by our group's sudden exodus of the community on *business*, my store of food was rapidly depleted. I rationed myself on apples and biscuits and, nursing feelings of rejection, proceeded to starve. My companions, meanwhile, came to refer to me as the skinny one who didn't like to eat much. I left the community before too long, none the wiser about how to share in Aboriginal communities.

At Jerrinja, my lesson was almost inverse. Pressed, not frequently, for small favours, lifts and minor purchases, I began to weigh up the requests in terms of my perceptions of their reasonableness and of the person's own financial capacities (an attitude which Peterson observes goes against the principles of demand sharing, 1993). My residing prejudices about the attrition of Aboriginal culture in a community so close to home and the apparent suburban familiarity of it all, inclined me to make less allowance for cultural difference and to interpret behaviours against my own moral code, in this case railing against a perception that I was being taken for a fool and holding expectations of reasonable financial management on the part of others. When a woman asked me how I was travelling, she was asking - clearly with an escape hatch - for money for her sons' lunch. Although I acceded to the request, my fieldnotes record my indignation, 'Three grown men and not a cent between them!' Amongst the conclusions drawn by Peterson about the practice of demand sharing is that it is a 'testing behaviour to establish the state of a relationship' (1993:870). Clearly in my flat and blunt refusals of sometimes very insignificant requests, some of my relationships were not looking too good. Meanwhile, I was being subjected to moral judgements about my character and criticised - in ways that also went over my head - by pointed critiques of the anti-sociability, meanness and materialism of other white people.

Of course, those made demands of within the system of demand sharing may refuse requests, and in fact the capacity to do so is held by Peterson as one of the features that makes it such a successful adaptation (1993:864). Jerrinja people did so frequently. Their refusals, however, as the following example show, are always couched in the frame of legitimate, if not always believable, excuses.

Maria who had asked me for a lift up to the shops, was assailed by her nephew as we backed out of the drive, asking her for cigarette money. She turned him down, telling him she had no money and was merely coming along with me for a ride. Upon reaching the shops, however, Maria's sense of familial obligation got the better of her and she bought a packet of cigarettes to take back to him.

There were limits, too, on how far one could press others. Feeling that her young cousin had been overtaxing her resources, a woman rebuked her with the accusation that she was not feeding her kids properly. The two came close to blows and didn't speak to one another for some weeks.

At Jerrinja, not all instances of sharing could be classified under the rubric of demand sharing, at least not in the sense of any explicit request or opportunistic presence on the part of the recipient, although the giver might certainly be responding to a sense of social obligation. Perhaps having roots in traditional protocols for the distribution of food - *a la* the game sharing rules documented by Altman (1987) - the prestation of unsought gifts, particularly of food, mostly raw seafood, occasionally cooked foods, to members of the family, was not uncommon. Most often, but not always, these gifts were made to older relatives and were primarily signs of respect and affection. Surpluses of seafood might be distributed more broadly. The commercial fishermen in particular regularly distributed seafood amongst the extended family. 'There's a terrible lot of fish I give away that another fisherman wouldn't. I give, you could say, thousands and thousands of dollars of fish away to my people.'

## Sociality

There is more than one 'currency' transacted in the process of sustaining relatedness at Jerrinja. Money, food, smokes, alcohol, but also time, talk, knowledge, respect and, as we have seen children, all circulate within an internal economy whose product is social connectedness. On a daily basis, relationships are affirmed and reproduced through sociable and sympathetic interaction. Visiting and receiving guests is one of the prime means of keeping up relationships. Jean Wellington recounts the hospitality her family extended to guests and shows how children were made to understand their responsibility to share, and show respect, and how the ethic is reproduced,

And sharing, you know, I know when we was kids, anyone could...we only had that two bedroom place and a kitchen little verandah round it but if anyone come we'd have to get of our beds to give... you know, we'd have to make our beds on the floor - ...well I've still done that when I was in Nowra here, get my kids out of the bed to give some of the elders or anyone older than them came they'd have to get in the room with the others and that spare room would be made up for whoever...so we sorta done it right through. Sorta carried it on in the family.

Beckett, writing about Wilcannia (1988), Birdsall (1988) for south-west Western Australia and others have recorded how Aboriginal people travel regularly over long distances to maintain their relations with kin (and with country); Beckett identifying 'beats' as those routes wherein people can be sure to find hospitality (1988:130). From my limited observation, there was relatively little visiting conducted over distances by Jerrinja residents, however visiting was an important activity within the mission and some people seemed to move on contracted 'beats' about the mission. Practicing sociality is the major occupation of many Jerrinja residents.

If I was home alone and looking for good company on the mission, I usually took myself to Geraldine's. Pretty well from first thing in the morning, Geraldine could be found, sitting in a chair in the sun outside her home, in the company of kin. Her earliest companions were her husband and teenage

children and maybe her brother from next door, however, before long the party would be swelled by the arrival, one by one, of various of Geraldine's female relatives, sisters, nieces and aunts, and their children. By and by the men would drift off on their own business and leave the women to their own devices. It usually took some time before the day's activities started to take shape, but whether they retired into Geraldine's house or garage to carry on their conversation, laugh and tell stories, take up a game of cards or sometimes enjoy a drink or migrated to one of the other women's homes to do the same; took buckets and hammers down the front to collect oysters or took children over to the heads for a swim, these women spent the major part of almost everyday in each other's company.

To pass time, card playing was the most regular activity. Groups from four to several gathered about the kitchen table, or sometimes on the floor. The games varied, but at that time, people had grown weary of the old faithful, pups, and 100 up or sevens were flavour of the month. Whenever I took part or looked on, the stakes were always modest, it might cost \$1 or \$2 to buy into the game, and then, if bets were involved they usually stood at 20 or 40c cents a round, yielding payouts most times in the vicinity of say \$15, but sometimes higher if there were more players<sup>10</sup>.

When there was money about, people found the congenial atmosphere enhanced by sharing a drink. Alcohol is appreciated for its capacity to put everyone in a happy mood, to induce high spirits and good humour, to relieve boredom and to give people the chance to relax and forget their worries. In part a legacy of the days when alcohol was prohibited to Aboriginal people, and in respect for some of the elders who object to drinking and carousing on the mission, alcohol consumption commonly takes place in the bushy reserve adjoining the mission, 'down the front' or at night, 'by the lilli pilli tree'. As often as not, however, these women drank at home, defending their rights to drink on the mission, saying they weren't harming anyone. They almost

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<sup>10</sup> There were at least two other regular women's card gatherings on the mission and at these games I had sometimes seen higher stakes - \$1 bets.

always chose, however, to keep their activities to themselves, indoors or hidden by the dark of night - out of the sight of disapproving eyes.

On a night out in town, during happy hour, when you could buy them two for the price of one, a shout of spirits was sometimes affordable, but on the mission it was always beer, port and moselle. A drinking session might begin rather modestly, the participants 'chucking in' for a case or two of Tooheys, a flagon of port and a cask of Moselle, but inevitably when these had been depleted, people didn't feel like stopping and second rounds were made to procure the money for further supplies. After their own funds were gone, and when regular borrowing partners had been exhausted, protracted discussions sometimes ensued about who else might be 'bitten' for a loan, one person sent out on various forays - some more, some less successful - to scrounge the money for another carton. Since none of the six households in this group had a vehicle, unless a relative from town was visiting, securing transport for the run to the bottle store was always a matter requiring considerable wrangling.

People retained their own stashes of beer, or kept careful note that the stock was fairly distributed - raiding someone else's store or impinging on another's share could be the cause of argument. The efforts to ensure that people received an equal share of the booty raised the drinking of port almost to the level of ritual. One person was appointed pourer, his or her job to measure out, under the careful scrutiny of others, equal nips of port which were then mixed into a cocktail with Coke, affectionately referred to as a 'Tyson'. The pourer could take pride on his or her consistent measures and ability to remember the order of drinkers<sup>11</sup>. At parties, everyone might drink together, but if they were drinking separately a single flagon might be split with fastidious care into two equal portions between the men and women.

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<sup>11</sup> Sansom notes a code amongst the drinkers in Darwin fringe camps that co-drinkers go through the stages of inebriation together, they should remain 'all level' (1980:61).

## **Alcohol and card playing**

Academics have frequently sought explanations for the pervasive popularity of drinking and card playing in Aboriginal communities (eg. Fink 1957, Altman 1987, Macdonald 2000b), however, none of these explanations, in my assessment, give sufficient emphasis to the social. The appeal, which I should stress is far from ubiquitous at Jerrinja, of drinking and card playing, would seem to lie primarily in the way these practices engage people in sociable activity in which moral values of egalitarianism, sharing, autonomy and primarily relatedness, are afforded both symbolic and practical expression.

The personal aspects of the practices are also usually neglected, to the detriment of understanding. The mood enhancing, escapist and addictive qualities of alcohol are a matter of no argument and as any inveterate gambler knows, card playing, has a compelling attraction of its own, engaging and exercising mental capacities, exciting the emotional flutterings of risk taking and, of course, holding out the chance of a windfall; it is one of those activities which Csikszentmihalyi (1997) might describe as conducive of 'flow', a state of absorbed engagement and concentration wherein one loses one's conscious apprehension of self. That drinking is an expression of suffering is given further consideration in the following chapter on shame.

The argument that they represent oppositional practices (c.f. Cowlishaw 1988; Morris 1989; Beckett 1964) can be traced at least going back to Reay (1945:300) and to Fink, who in the 1950s wrote that drinking and gambling, amongst other things, were consciously and flagrantly pursued as a means of emphasizing social distance from whites (Fink 1957:103). Some have sought to explain card playing in rather simplistic terms as a mechanism of economic redistribution (c.f. Altman 1987:155-6). More sophisticated analyses have pointed to it as a means of reallocating the resources drawn from the welfare system in ways that reproduce the play of fate and personal skill and the 'politics of obligation and reciprocity' characteristic of a traditional hunter-gathering economy (Macdonald 2000a:104,105).

Referring back to Macdonald's arguments about card playing, and without negating the insights gained, it seemed to me, at least in the circle I have described above, that



at Jerrinja the game was not focused on 'making a killing', and there was little there in the meagrely windfalls to enliven the politics of obligation and reciprocity (Macdonald 2000b:14), rather the stakes, it seemed to me, were purposely kept low so that the games could continue throughout the day. Neither were people prepared to leave the outcome of the game solely in the hands of 'fate and personal skill', leaving the social side to reallocations of winnings through giving and sharing. The game was, right through, marked with temperances and demands of the social. At Jerrinja, women's games were characterised by an innovation, disdained by the men, allowing players disqualified by their low scores to buy back into the game at the least competitive score. This provision increases the winning stakes but, more importantly, emphasises inclusion, reinforcing the social message and function of the game.

At Jerrinja, drinking is most often explained, as a remedy for boredom and as a means for overcoming shyness, although its stress relieving and pain masking qualities are also appreciated. Alcohol is valued for its ability to create a convivial atmosphere for the conduct of sociable activity. Its social function is highlighted by the following observations. Firstly, although a person may be a regular drinker at home, when away from the family, the same person may refrain from it altogether - one man explained how he went to work periodically in Sydney and never touched a drink, but when he came back to Nowra he'd be on it again. Secondly, at Jerrinja, chronic individual drinking habits are explained in terms of dysfunction; a masking of the pain of traumatic personal life experiences<sup>12</sup>. Finally, abstinence holds overtones of anti-sociality, there are underlying accusations that the person who won't share a drink holds themselves above the other, and teetotallers, especially those who are reformed drinkers, are frequently reminded of good times shared in the past and exhorted to come back to the fold, 'That's what they all say to me, "Oh you better start up drinking mate. We miss you" - having parties and that.'

I should not leave this discussion without noting the obvious, that alcohol consumption may have decidedly anti-social effects, a fact acknowledged by both drinkers, and those vehemently opposed to it alike. The noise and rowdiness which

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<sup>12</sup> Amongst which childhood experiences of sexual molestation and institutionalisation are exemplary. One woman, who had spent some years in a Children's Home, said the government ought to be sued for turning people into alcoholics.

may be associated with drinking is upsetting for some residents. Moreover, drinking sessions deteriorate with some regularity into arguments and fights and have contributed to a significant incidence of domestic violence on the mission; the epigram that pension day, 'happy day' is followed by 'boxing day' attesting to the fact. The children of drinkers speak of hurtful and harmful effects on their family life, while the diversion of moneys away from food and other necessary expenditures produces recurring economic hardships. People are aware of deleterious effects on their health, both direct and indirect, physical and psychological - alcoholism and chronic liver disease are real and present dangers - while some critics mourn that people are wasting their lives away.

### **Social security and the reproduction of relatedness**

Despite the fact that the community is, in the main, economically sustained by *individualised* social security payments, the sustenance of the individual is a community accomplishment or perhaps more accurately an achievement of the individual in maintaining and working his or her relationships with others. There are probably few people at Jerrinja who rely solely on their own thrifty budget management skills to make a dole or pension cheque last over two weeks. Money comes into the community only to enter substantially into new circuits of circulation. Most people operate on a boom/bust cycle. A young woman explains the Koori approach to money,

What Koori can manage money? Comes in one hand and goes out the other.

When you've got it you spend it and when you haven't, you haven't.

It is not uncommon for a person (particularly amongst the drinkers) to declare broke on the same day their fortnightly benefit is received; a household shop-up or contribution to kitty, the repayment of moneys borrowed, a spate of demands on the part of others for loans, smokes or other items, several card games and a major contribution to the 'throw in' for grog soon depletes the limited windfall. People are reliant then upon the largesse of others, the loans they can procure, and often their

fishing and gathering efforts, to sustain them from one pay day to the next. In a practical sense, the viability of the system depends on the staggering of social security payments, whereby cash injections into the system are distributed over the weeks<sup>13</sup>. In a social sense, this style of economic management is substantially reliant on the upkeep of close and dependable relations with kin; it is a product of and dependent upon the value placed upon relatedness and the Koori ethic of 'sharing and caring'. The social security system, then, is put to service in the reproduction of Aboriginal sociality, working only indirectly to sustain the individual.

### **Social isolation: being 'One out'**

Social isolation, a state locally described by the expression of being 'one out' is, within the field I am describing as the common moral grain at Jerrinja, felt as agonising, read as dystopic and judged as either pitiable or reprehensible. The concept is critically tied up with the emotion of shame and will be further elucidated in the following chapter which takes shame as its focus. The sense of social isolation or shame of this type is most frequently engendered in the situation in which a Koori finds him or herself alone in a mainstream environment. One can also be in a position of social isolation on the mission. Some people at Jerrinja have felt increasingly socially marginalised by changing political dynamics and by what they describe as a decline in friendliness on the mission, a theme to which I will return.

Choosing to be 'one out' can be seen by others as indicative of emotional distress. When a young friend told me that he was not talking to his cousins, that he had been staying inside at home each day occupying himself with lone activities and learning that you could enjoy yourself on your own, that you didn't need company; and then followed that by describing how his cousins on the mission were bewildered and annoyed and how they thought there was something wrong with him, it struck me that they were probably right. His claims, and the fact of how unused he was to being alone, brought into clear relief how fundamental one's locatedness and participation in social networks are to Koori life.

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<sup>13</sup> Koories at Jerrinja report that in the past, social security payments were synchronised, and with everyone rich or broke at once the boom/bust cycle was greatly exaggerated. Reliance on fishing and gathering was essential for survival.

On the other hand, one may be criticised in terms of being 'one out' for holding oneself out of social networks. The criticism - 'Who's (he)? He's just one out' - was prompted by the perceived presumptuousness of someone to speak for others, or represent an opinion on group affairs, from a socially isolated position. Moreover, it was an expression of discontent at the negations of relatedness and failures of participation that put him in that position in the first place.

If any domain at Jerrinja is more profoundly marked by the tensions between autonomy and relatedness it is politics. Since Myers first identified it (1986), many authors have affirmed the significance of these dual principles in the construction of the Aboriginal person (see Madonald 1986, Martin 1983). At Jerrinja the situation is no different. The desire and obligation to acknowledge one's relatedness and interdependence exists in tension with an opposite thrust toward autonomy. People at Jerrinja maintain the right to do their own thing, to have their own mind, not to be subject to the control or demands of others. 'You can't tell people what to do. You know what Koories are like.'

One's legitimacy in local politics is predicated on ones' being 'one of the people'. Liberman catches the principle in his discussion on participation in group discussion in Central Australia.

There are no leaders...who convene and direct discussion. Anyone may participate in the direction, but not 'anyone' as an individual personality - 'anyone' as an anonymous member of the gathering (1985:75).

Opinions spoken from and formed from a position of social isolation are disdained.

Carmen was ropeable after a land council meeting. She had disagreed strongly with one of the motions in the meeting, yet hadn't spoken up she said because she had no one to back her up.

At Jerrinja, various individuals were criticised by others as unsuitable for leadership roles because they couldn't get on with the people or they didn't know how to

communicate. On the other hand, it is also stressed that one should be free to make one's own mind up. There are frequent expressions that no-one can be boss for others and criticisms of those who try. 'She just wants to be boss all the time'. The institution of democratic representation goes down like a lead balloon. 'No-one runs my life. We all live here, we're a community. No-one's a boss here'. Children are taught to defend their autonomy. Beverly speaks of her four year old son, 'He won't let nobody push him around - which is good'. To be willing to defend one's position physically is valued, 'People shouldn't mess with Koories or they'll beat you up', a young woman said. 'Not everyone's like that', someone else volunteered. 'Every Koori I know is' came the response.

### **Flashness**

The person, at Jerrinja, who refuses a drink, the woman who buys a new car, the teenager who aspires to go on to higher education - like the subjects of Fink's Barwon study (1957:107) - are all likely to find themselves dubbed 'flash'. For a fast track entry into the value system of any given group, 'the insult', staking a decisive line between virtue and vice, must be hard to rival. 'Flash' and its other Jerrinja variants, 'hoity toity', 'posh', 'upper class', 'up him/herself' (the latter especially amongst the younger generation) mark out major contours in the Koori moral terrain. Here, a complex of values is implicated. In the first place, a critique of egotism and individualism underlies the accusation. To be 'flash' is to make an ostentatious display of oneself, to hold a high opinion of oneself, to go one's own way and to assert one's distinction from and superiority over others. 'Who does she think she is?' The social value lies rather in equalitarianism, in mutual recognition, and, of course, in forging identity and relationship with others. To be 'flash' is to deny equality, relatedness and interdependence.

In the second place, and relatedly, the aspersion 'flash' reflects a negative valuation on materialism and acquisitiveness. Poverty has been central to the experience of Jerrinja people past and present. It has become a constituent part of their identity as Koories, firstly as something against which they, and their ancestors, have had to struggle to survive, and secondly, as a positive value, a confirmation of their anti-materialist ethic and their propensity to share rather than accumulate. 'Money isn't

important', said Eileen, 'I always taught my children that.' A virtue is made from a proclaimed inability to save and budget,

'What Koorie can manage money? Comes in one hand and goes out the other.  
When you've got it you spend it and when you haven't, you haven't"

In Koori eyes, the ownership of symbols of wealth speaks not positively of status and success but of the negation of obligations to kin. One could only afford expensive items by hoarding one's resources and closing one's ears to demands from others for sharing. Furthermore, as Gaynor Macdonald has recently argued, monolithic items (car, house) are not amenable to division and distribution amongst those in a legitimate position to make demands on their owners (2000:16)<sup>14</sup>.

Critically, 'flashness' is perceived to entail a rejection of Aboriginality, both because it implies an investment in mainstream standards and attitudes which judge and condemn Aborigines, and because 'not being flash' has come to play a role in defining what it is to be Koori. The negative traits to which accusations of 'flashness' point are the stereotypical values attributed to whites and against which Koories define themselves. If 'flash' represents the wayward behaviour of certain Koories, it is the expected mode of operation for whitefellas. To be flash is to align oneself with whites; to assume an attitude of contempt and superiority and a desire for distance. The negative evaluation of flashness redeems Aboriginality from a series of negative contrasts - black/white, dependent/self-sufficient, poor/wealthy, prodigal/thrifty. But while 'flashness' implies a critique of white values and priorities, the vitriol behind the accusation is directed especially at the perceived treachery of those Koories who would cross the line to deny themselves and their people.

While other analysts have tended to emphasise Aboriginal antipathy to flashness, and the adoption of behaviours inverse to it, as a case of opposition for opposition's sake, a symbolic refusal of white norms and defiant assertion of social distance (Fink 1956, Morris 1988), I would argue for greater positive content. Aversions to the quality of flashness also reflect a well-founded perception of the irreconcilability of mainstream

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<sup>14</sup> Although as Grayson Gerard has shown the possibilities of service make the motorcar an eminently

ideals with the classic Koori moral universe. At base the conflict lies between the contrary world views and ethical demands inspired by capitalism and a social system configured on pre-capitalist principles. Tensions between these principles mark the relations between Koories - and within them - as well as their relations with the 'outside' world.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Reay and Sitlington, and Fink brought to light the existence of 'class', status or prestige divisions within Aboriginal communities of western NSW, basically founded on degrees of assimilation to mainstream life. While Fink found that skin colour was a significant factor amongst the status conscious 'upper group' in Barwon (1957:103), group membership was primarily determined by place of residence, by differences in lifestyle, employment and attitudes toward homekeeping and by the particular values and aspirations held (103-106). The closer these resembled the white community, the higher their prestige, at least in the eyes of those thus defined at the top and by the white observers. The highest classes, it was reported, were zealous in their desire for mainstream acceptance, cleaving to mainstream ideals, for example of industry, thrift, hygiene, 'marital constancy' and sobriety, disassociating themselves from Aborigines of the lower classes and using every opportunity to gain greater familiarity with white ways.

As opposed to those in the 'higher' status groups who preferred to live in or as close as possible to town, Aborigines at the other end of the spectrum were found typically to live on the Aboriginal mission or reserve or in marginal fringe camps. While the writers considered these people bereft of anything but the final vestiges of traditional lifestyles, the group were shown, particularly by Fink, to actively reject white people, their ways and values, resolutely maintaining an Aboriginal identity based in opposition and scorning those who sort conformity.

From the present perspective, it seems clear that similar divisions would have been operational on the NSW south coast in the same period. Bell records in his 1956 study that some Aboriginal people who held permanent jobs seemed 'desirous of dissociating themselves from the general Aboriginal community', noting one family

of this kind at Orient Point (1956:189). To a degree, distinctions of this type continue to hold significance today. Sentiments of mutual disdain, distrust and resentment still mark the divisions between those whose perspectives tend to align with the mainstream and those whose outlook lies opposed. As highlighted in the preceeding chapters, Jerrinja people have long been exposed to the lifeways and values of the mainstream. The influence of reserve management, the involvement in paid employment, have all changed people's perspectives and have offered, or more accurately pressed, alternative ways upon them.

Over the years, various individuals and families have made the choice to leave Jerrinja, 'trying', as one old resident of the mission said, 'to better theyselves'. Moving to town, working hard in paid employment and adopting mainstream attitudes of thrift and homemaking, some of these people now live in comfortable style in privately own homes, a fact they say is resented by their kin. From their perspective, they have 'worked for it', and along with the benefits, have inherited the pressures and responsibilities of meeting mortgage repayments and higher living costs. The attitude of dependency they identify as characteristic of those at Jerrinja is an object for scorn. One man described them as mongrels, and a number criticised them as having 'no get up and go.' If Jerrinja people acted like they did in the mainstream, it was argued, 'they'd be out in the street.' Meanwhile, people back at Jerrinja accuse those in town, and some on the mission, of being coconuts, obsequiously conforming to white ways, denying their Aboriginality and their kin.

In the current political context, where greater values and benefits may be accrued in affirming an Aboriginal identity, people who have chosen the more mainstream road, may find themselves at some disadvantage. It is, for example, a matter of bitterness that these people can not access certain government schemes and benefits targeted at Aboriginal people, for example, low interest home loans<sup>15</sup>. They may also miss out on benefits channelled through community based organisations.

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<sup>15</sup> Presumably because of income levels.



## Mean and cunning - whites

As previously discussed, the maintenance of kin relations is undergirded by a particular set of moral precepts about how one should act in relation to others; these in turn are productive of concepts of what the good person is. At Jerrinja then kindness, generosity, compassion and sociability rate amongst the most valued qualities in a person<sup>16</sup>. Possession of a personality type engendered by, and in turn productive of, these particular moral precepts, makes a person inclined to do, and to find satisfaction and enjoyment in doing, the activities that sustain relatedness.

If whites have their stereotypes of Aborigines, Koories have their own stereotypes to define and distinguish whites. Frequent contrasts are drawn between the moral qualities of their own society and people and those of whites. The lack of commitment to family and the absence of supportive social networks elicits wonder, criticism and sometimes sympathy. Commenting on a young Scottish traveller, an old woman said she thought there must be something wrong with her, moving around like that. 'She doesn't have any family down here.' Jean Wellington's<sup>17</sup> thoughts reflect the value placed on relatedness and helping and assert moral superiority for the Koori way:

You know there's a lot of poor white people out there, who haven't got anyone... See Koories are different, in that way, they sorta, doesn't matter whether you're related or not they sorta help one another. You only gotta look at these funerals, they mightn't know people and yet if they know there's a funeral on for a Koori you'll see that many strange Koories coming along, you know. I think they got that more closeness and sorta... 'Cause there's a lot of poor white people out there (?)... [who are lonely]. But Koori people always seem to have someone, you can go to that Koori's place and they make you welcome. I think that's the difference, 'cause there's a difference there.

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<sup>16</sup> I find it interesting that my notes contain almost no reference to this type of summation of a person's character. Rather people seem praised or condemned by particular behaviours – 'she never waves', 'he tries to standover', 'she always takes people in', 'she wouldn't sit down and talk with people'.

<sup>17</sup> Mrs Wellington was brought up on the mission but now lives in town.

The white lack of friendliness draws bitter reproach, 'dirty white slut, never cracks a smile'.

One woman told me, 'Koories are the kindest people you could ever meet'. In comparison whites are considered to be mean, acquisitive and sly. 'If a black man had \$1 he'd give you 50c, where I don't think a whiteman would. He'd say he got none'. One man, explaining how things were changing on the mission, said, 'In the old days they'd share everything they had. Now they're becoming more like whites - cunning. They hide half their money and share out a smaller amount.'

In the bar of the Empire Hotel one evening, after the football, a small group gathered talking in the middle of the room. Andrew and his white girlfriend were amongst them. Seated around a table, three women from Jerrinja looked on. Sheila, Andrew's ex, was agitated, swearing and cursing and proclaiming that she was going to beat up the white woman, who looked over smugly. Sheila was geeing for support from her kin.

The adoption of mainstream values poses the most serious threat to the maintenance of Aboriginal sociality. Relationships forged between Koori men and white women inflame the passions of their kin. The women, it is felt, steal the men away<sup>18</sup>, severing them from their families and pressuring them to conform to white ways. Work commitments and career aspirations, financial responsibilities to meet mortgages, furnish their homes and cover family living expenses remove them time-wise and economically from the interactions which would sustain their full membership in the family. Their failure to contribute generously to resource flows within the family is not understood and resented. The white women are inevitably suspected of thinking themselves above their Koori in-laws and of leading their husbands to do the same.

It may well have been coincidental that I heard no similar complaints about white men stealing Koori women away, although their bringing husbands to live on the mission was cause for some grievance. Most of the white men who have joined wives on the

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<sup>18</sup> It is interesting in a more general way to consider the symbolic significance of the bit-bit women, supernatural beings thought to lure women away, particularly in the light of an ideological emphasis and apparent statistical pattern trend toward matrifocality and matriliney.

mission have integrated themselves substantially within the norms of Jerrinja society and many of them had been substantially involved with Aboriginal people prior to their coming<sup>19</sup>. One man made a point of telling me that his uncles before him had married Aboriginal women and that he had grown up amongst Koories. There were women who had married white men and left the mission. The only comment I heard in this regard was the report of a mother telling her daughter that she had done well for herself.

### **'Everything's changing'**

As Macdonald has noted for the Wiradjuri (2000b), the observation that 'things are not like they used to be' is a common theme amongst Jerrinja residents. People look back nostalgically to the 'old days' when it is said people were friendlier, when they all pulled together and when they were 'happy with little'. 'We was that close,' Geraldine reflects, '...and we'd all help one another.'

Macdonald (2000b) argues that one of the reasons for the decline in sharing is the individuated nature of social security benefits. The payments, she says, are relatively small and cannot support sharing on a scale large enough to build prestige. She notes that while substantial new resources have become available through organisations there are significant constraints on their capacity to be assimilated to the demands of sharing. Firstly the sort of benefits available - cars, houses, jobs - are not amenable to sharing because they are indivisible. Further, she finds, there is almost no discretionary power in their allocation and they certainly are not available on demand. While these factors are significant in explaining perceived changes, Macdonald finds that the constitution of community organisations, leads to redefinitions in personhood - the creation of roles of supplier and client- antithetical to Wiradjuri principles (2000a:108). Furthermore, the structure of indigenous organisations is found to undermine the legitimacy of locally-based authority structures because leadership is determined on principles of democratic representation, without regard for locally accorded differences in status; because they operate on an individualistic notion of

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<sup>19</sup> Although this was similarly the case with some of the non-Aboriginal wives.

exchange; and because they give misplaced emphasis to notions of collectivisation under the 'rubric of 'community' (2000b:16).

In answer to the question, has demand sharing collapsed? Macdonald concludes that it has not. It is rather, she argues, the very persistence of the demand sharing ethic in changing circumstances which lies behind the escalation in 'tension, hostility, resentment, competitiveness, back-stabbing and vendetta-type behaviour' (2000a:17). When such an ethic is held to, in the absence of resources suitable for distribution, what one is left with is 'the person who should have given' (2000a:17).

It may be that social security benefits have inferior prestige value (Macdonald 2000b:13) in cycles of exchange - Povinelli has observed that money generated by the efforts of the 'labouring subject' is subject to 'greater discretionary privilege on the part of the owner and carries more prestige value' (Macdonald 2000b:13) - nevertheless, these chunks of cash are certainly eminently amenable to division and to conversion into those small consistently sought after items, like drinks and cigarettes, which are staples of exchange at Jerrinja. There are, as I have previously argued, those at Jerrinja who throw themselves almost wholly to the mercy of a vital economy of demand sharing, but even those who exercise more discretion in the management of their benefits certainly allocate portions of them in meeting demands of, and thereby nurturing ties with, their kin.

I suspect that there may be some difference between those transactions which take place within an ethic of demand sharing and others which are more strictly and formally considered loans. It seems that in the case of the latter, in which a particular sum of money is lent to be exactly repaid within one social security cycle, meaning is more fully circumscribed within the monetary transaction itself; they do not have the same significance in generating sociality. Hence Mal felt he could not refuse Poop a loan because he knew the latter would have the money to repay him on dole day. The fact that money has no immediate use value, does not contribute directly to the sustenance of the person who receives it, and may not incorporate the essence of the giver in the same way as other items may also precipitate this less important role for building relatedness through the purely monetary transaction.

At Jerrinja, money was often scorned as an object of contempt and negative effect - 'she's evil old money' - was repeatedly indicated as a source of the breaking down of social relations on the mission- 'everything's changing money, money, money'. This suspicion, though less dramatic, than that documented by Taussig amongst Colombian peasants, may perceptively mark the process of alienation in a 'historical context in which one mode of production and life is being supplanted by another' (1980:17).

### **The selfish home**

More than one person traced the negative changes in atmosphere at the mission to the 1970s housing project which saw meagrely old shacks replaced with three bedroom brick homes. 'Ever since the first postholes were dug', so one man told me, things changed drastically for the worse. 'Before everyone was friendly, you could walk into anyone's house and they'd give you a feed.' Such timing would fit with Macdonald's schema, for here was the first instance of substantial resources being channelled into the community through a local organisation with the benefits dispersed strictly of the indivisible type. It was a large project, the twenty one homes built being sufficient to house those presently resident at the mission and to draw back families who had earlier left the place to resettle in town<sup>20</sup>, however, since I believe the initial request was for 27 homes, there must have been some politicking in the allocation. Beyond the social structural tensions which may have been directly produced by unequal control over resources and organisational politics, however, the new houses represented a tremendous change in the physical structure of the mission. These changes in the built environment, I would argue, have been a significant contributor to the breakdown in sociality at Jerrinja.

Myers notes within the Pintupi lifeworld, 'contact with others and the necessity of response, of visibility and negotiability in all forms of action, yield little room for privacy' (1986:16). The minimal place of walls in classical Aboriginal communities gave greater scope to the maintenance of relatedness through constant social interaction and open access of people to the scrutiny and demands of others. At Jerrinja, the old houses would certainly have sustained a lack of privacy. They were

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<sup>20</sup> A factor which itself probably upset local social dynamics.

so tiny there was 'barely room to swing a cat' and it must be imagined that a good portion of everyday family life was conducted out of doors, where people's activities could be viewed by others and where they were open to all forms of communication. In contrast, the new brick homes with their relatively spacious interiors and their sense of closure to the outside world, tended to produce, in both perception and reality, the cloistering of individual family life, decreasing the opportunities for friendly engagement, sheltering (or depriving) people from demands, and from offerings of hospitality, giving people greater opportunity to hide their resources and generally raising the level of suspicion and jealousy.

The suburban brick home and its fences and its sheltering landscaping is the architectural corollary to the individuated man of Western capitalism. Morris makes the observation, with respect to the replacement by wooden houses of bark huts and bush camps amongst the Dhan-Gadi, that 'encoded in such material forms is a set of culturally pervasive principles associated with fundamental patterns of social interaction within the dominant society' (1989:81). Although he notes that the 'internal ordering of space' in the wooden houses represented 'the "correct" or "civilised" way to live in terms of the dominant society', he was optimistic that the Dhan-gadi simply co-opted the forms to fit their own pattern of social relations (1989:81). I would be less confident at Jerrinja. The tyranny of architecture is not complete, as the use of housing in remote communities would suggest, but it is influential. Moreover, there is less scope for reinterpretation of the meanings of the built environment in the midst of white suburbia and after years of supervised living under reserve managers.

There are some, at Jerrinja, notably especially those who also partake more thoroughly in systems of demand sharing, who continue to spend substantial time sitting outdoors, on verandahs or on the lawns in front of their homes. The majority, sometimes influenced by particular housing layouts, for example patios oriented away from streets, but often apparently by conscious choice, tend to confine themselves rigidly to inside spaces. These are the people more likely to express regret at the change in friendliness of the place. The overall effect, has been as one woman puts it, to make the place a 'ghost town'. Another man echoes her, 'It's like a morgue... They keeps to theyselves. You don't see nobody.' The situation has been exacerbated by

the advent of private vehicles. Although their reasons may be various, the fact that people choose to drive to nearby shops or even between closely located homes on the mission further reduces opportunities for communication and for demand sharing and is signal of the desire to do so. Hiding one's resources to avoid the demands of kin was not an uncommon strategy in classical Aboriginal society but it was far from foolproof in a very open social environment (c.f. Peterson 1993:868). The contemporary lived environment represents the opposite extreme, where perhaps the possibilities for hiding are too effective, producing ever increasing degrees of social isolation. To make a last, possibly stretched point on the issue of the effects of new housing, although they all shared similar positions, I think it may be arguable, that the relative ostentatiousness of their new homes, produced an automatic sort of reaction to flashness against each other.

### **Them not us**

Much of the vitriol and accusation surrounding office-bearers in local organisations arises, not because those elected are *not* in a position to satisfy demands or expectations for sharing made upon them, as Macdonald (2000a, 2000b) has suggested - legitimately or not they often wield great discretionary power over substantial resources - but because they *do*, in fact, distribute benefits according to this logic, a logic which leaves many without any basis on which to make claims of their own. 'Whatever family is in charge of the land council they get the benefits'. 'They're working their own mob in, paying their own people. It's all one way. Once they got the power behind them. What it comes down to is jealousy.'

As I have previously argued, demand sharing is an ideological principle which supports the maintenance of the group, in this case conceived as family or, at varying levels, by the notion of 'my people'. The same degrees of relationship do not pertain between everyone; people are expected to be more demanding and more generous to those with whom they share meaningful relations. I would argue that at Jerrinja decreasing levels of sharing and friendliness must, in part, be attributed to increasing fragmentation of the definition of 'us'.

In the days of the reserve, their common historical experiences and subjection under white management, provided a source of solidarity between Koori residents.

Although this still holds true, and in certain contexts people may foreground their membership of Jerrinja as a community<sup>21</sup>, the absence of an ongoing and tangible focus of opposition, dilutes the immediacy of this potential source of unity. In addition to this source of unity, I believe that a greater awareness of kin relatedness in the past may have fostered stronger social ties across the community. The existence or significance of certain kin relationships seems to have been lost, and families increasingly alienated by the obscuring of such ties. Expectations for interaction and interdependency have become confined within more constricted notions of the family group.

Even those extended cognatic descent groups recognising themselves under the idiom of the surnamed family are increasingly subject to fragmentary pressure. Diverging family histories, differential assimilation of mainstream values, physical isolation and conflicting political agendas have weakened solidarity. It could be argued further that in a system where the affirmation of relatedness is premised on ongoing face-to-face social and economic transaction, there are certain limits on the social distance over which meaningful relationships can be sustained, within an ever-expanding network of kin.

Macdonald's (2000b) observations that the structure of contemporary indigenous organisations - based as they are on democratic representation - undermine locally-based authority structures by failing to recognise locally recognised status divisions is important, but, drawing on my earlier discussion on the value of autonomy in Koori politics, I would argue that it is the notion of leadership itself, which is particularly problematic for Jerrinja people. The continual cycle of griping, finger-pointing and delegitimisation of both leaders and organisations, signals a solid rejection of western notions of democratic representation.

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<sup>21</sup> The appointment of an administrator by the NSW Land Council rallied people together to some degree for a brief time.



## Appreciating sociality

I left Jerrinja, after a year's fieldwork, disappointed in my abilities to discern where 'difference' lay. On those occasions when I returned for a brief visit, I would tell myself that I must observe everything much more intensely this time, that there was certainly something I had missed, that I ought to listen more closely to people's conversation. It was with considerable frustration then, that I found that what people often wanted to talk about was something I was least interested in, the things we had done together when I was there, or even worse about time they had spent with me in Sydney or at my home. It is only now that I think I begin to understand and appreciate that this recounting of social experience, of happy memories, was (as I suppose it is in any society) a means of expressing and reinforcing a relationship with me and of reaffirming the value of sociality. I remember now, listening to many tales told and retold about memorable social events enjoyed amongst family and friends that I took little note of at the time. Macdonald (1988) has analysed stories of fights as mythic representations of the values and social dynamics of Wiradjuri society. There is no doubt fertile ground for recording and analysing the stories that have emerged from that time Geraldine sang Paper Rose in the talent quest, or Loni's 21st, or the night someone danced on the table top at the club. What is immediately clear is that the moral value placed on sociality and relatedness is being represented, and that sociality and relatedness are themselves being recreated in the telling.

This experience also prompts me to make the point that the drawing of boundaries does not exclude interaction, positive and negative, perfunctionary or intimate, with those who lay beyond its bounds. It is, of course, essential to give recognition to the manifold and sometimes deeply intimate ties which pertain between people at Jerrinja and what I am broadly designating as the mainstream. On various bases, I and others might be included within certain defining boundaries which include Jerrinja people. Nevertheless, one thing I, and other outsiders, will never be able to claim is the right to be *owned* by Jerrinja people, as one of their own.

To my mind, the injunction to '*own* your own people' derives its moral force from two directions. In the first place, I argue, it emerges directly from indigenous traditions in which kinship and relatedness, and their attendant obligations, play the

key organising roles in social interaction and identity. Jerrinja is best understood as a kin-based moral community, in which relatedness provides the primary structural principle for social, economic and political organisation and in which a person's identity and worth is measured, in the first instance, by one's recognition of, and by, family and one's participation in sociable relations with them.

On the other hand, the imperative to *own* one's people - at family, community and broader pan-Aboriginal levels - constitutes a reaction to the crushing and institutionalised disrespect and disdain which mainstream Australia has meted out to Aboriginal people; a response of defiance and solidarity that may have become particularly important in the era of assimilationism where the government sought to hive off individuals and merge them into mainstream life, demanding in the process that they disavow and disconnect themselves from kin and kind. This aspect will be more centrally considered in Chapter Seven.

## Conclusion

The present chapter has sought to explore the 'inside domain' at Jerrinja as a socio-cultural space which, although necessarily suspended in tension and heavily implicated with the dominant order and hegemonic discourses, operates a life, logic and politics substantially of its own. There is little doubt that, at Jerrinja, a person's sense of who they are and what they do is - as a product of their indigenous heritage and history - closely bound up with their locatedness and belonging in a network of kin. In this respect, they are set substantially at odds with the broader social world in which they find themselves encapsulated.

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on two other vital elements which distinguish Jerrinja life and worldview from that of their close neighbours. The first is the issue of spiritual belief, a case in which distinction is relatively easily drawn; the second is fishing practice, which, in a district that remains a preserve of white commercial fisherman and a haven for leisure anglers, is less easily disentangled. I argue that, although all three elements, kin orientation, spiritual belief and fishing practice, are at times employed in self-conscious definition of self and group, or turned, by various means, to political effect, they primarily subsist as the inconspicuous frames and

everyday preoccupations of the lived and taken-for-granted Jerrinja world. Within the broader argument of this thesis I contend that the persistence of this 'inside domain' has, and continues to depend upon processes of boundary maintenance, both externally and internally generated, which limit interaction, encourage inward allegiance and reproduce the context in which significant continuities in culture can be sustained.

## Vignette: A BLACKFELLA'LL NEVER STARVE BY THE SEA

Beach hauling is heavy work. Jerrinja's commercial fishing crew have been up since 4 (am). The mullet are running and they're out to secure an early position on a Jervis Bay beach. Jeeps are driven along the sand and a lookout set up on top of an old shell midden at Red Rock. From here they can watch for an approaching school. The fishermen read subtle patterns and shades in the water as signs of the type and size of a school. It's the spotter's job to direct the oarsmen, who row out with their net to encircle the fish. You need strong arms working against the waves. And then, if you're lucky, comes the haul. There's usually six or seven in the crew, but its tough work hauling hand over hand. Things haven't changed that much from the way the old timers did it.

Back home, some men have been down not long after daybreak to check their lobster pots at Crookhaven Heads. In the right season the pots can be very fruitful and divers too will test their luck at familiar nesting sites. Had the weather been stormy the night before it might have been worth checking the rock platforms for mutton fish, abalone - a skilled eye can spot them camouflaged on the rocks - but the weather has been fine and this day is shaping up as no exception.

The day is still young when other men set out with rods and reels for the river. They may choose to fish from the dyke or perhaps row out in the channel or to one of the islands in its stream. The bream hole is another spot the Koories have always fished. If they have a productive day there'll be enough fish for their own household and some to give to others. Elderly parents, grandparents, old aunts and uncles are regular recipients of seafood offerings.

Since it is such a lovely day, the tide low and the cupboards a little bare, a group of women - aunts, nieces and cousins - have decided to go "down the front" for oysters. Encrusted rocks in the mud flats provide an apparently never-ending supply. They are followed by a horde of children, their own and half the other mission kids. As the women go about knocking the oysters from the rocks and collecting them into a bucket the children swim in the shallows or perhaps collect periwinkles in an old can.

The women feel at ease, the atmosphere is social; it's too nice to go home. One of the teenagers is sent back for bread and drinking water. They'll barbeque the oysters on the beach and make a day of it. An obliging young woman makes a fire and the oysters are carefully barbequed in the hot coals. When the moisture begins to bubble out the oysters are ready and are flicked from the fire, cooled a little and prised open with knife or screwdriver. The oysters are fat and sweet; a meal like that is hard to beat. Some women keep extra oysters aside to take home for the men. Perhaps they'll make a curry, though pippies probably make the tastier stew.

An old woman watches from her verandah. She notes the sou-east breeze and sees the tide is on the turn. If she was fit, she'd be down there collecting oysters too, or fishing. She used to love fishing for blackfish off the dyke. In the early days, she remembers, had a little rod made from a stick of oak and a cotton reel, with a safety pin hook. When she was in her late teens she lived for a while at Jervis Bay; there they fished and collected copper shells from the bombing range for sale. There were times, she recalls, when she was a young mother, if it weren't for the fish and that around here, she'd have found it impossible to feed her kids. Peering across the river at Comerong Island she observes a few cars on the point. She sees the sun glint on fishing rods, she can just make out the figures; they're *gubbahs* she thinks.

Short of the price for a case, a couple of young men are diving for abalone at Tilberry. Though they'd much rather, and most often do, eat them themselves, sometimes you just need to barter or sell a few for a bit of cash. The *bimbulas* they pick up aren't of much interest to anyone else, they boil them up in an old Sunshine can and prise out the flesh with a safety pin.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LIVING DIFFERENCE

In the preceding chapter I have sought to give insight into the moral economy and social forms which speak Jerrinja's distinction from the mainstream. In this chapter, I wish to further illustrate the way in which Koories at Jerrinja live their difference in distinction to, in confrontation with, and in spite of, encapsulating white frames. I take up Morris' point that, in the context of colonisation, Aboriginal difference could no longer be lived unselfconsciously and that the perpetuation of indigenous practices came to constitute acts of resistance (1989:80) and will give attention to the way in which people at Jerrinja consciously employ distinctive cultural beliefs and practices to define their identity. I note too the deployment of cultural difference as a contemporary strategy for political leverage (see Morris 1989:219, Turner 1991) and the efflorescence of cultural renaissance and revival. The primary concern here, however, will be to show that, a good deal of the time, Jerrinja preoccupations with matters of fishing, superstitious caution and spiritual belief, which will form the focus of this chapter, are driven by and contained within mundane local frames and sentimental outlooks which have been reproduced, with notable similitude, over successive generations.

#### **Of cultural difference: harvest from the sea**

'God', says Graham Connolly, 'made Aboriginal people to fish.' Today, the harvest of seafood remains vitally important, not just as a contribution to diet, but as an activity which is central to Jerrinja identity and way of life. Although there are some these days who prefer to do all their 'gathering from the supermarket', by force of economic necessity, dietary preference, cultural habit and pure love of the game, a great many people at Jerrinja involve themselves regularly, if not daily, in fishing or gathering activity - mostly private, sometimes commercially - and nearly everyone at the mission benefits from the fruits of their labour.



With extensive middens, rock shelters containing fish bones and shells, and petroglyphs depicting fish and sea mammals, the archaeological record provides strong testimony to the important part played by sea resources in the economy, diet, technology and probably religion of Aboriginal people in the Jervis Bay region from ancient times, up to and beyond 1788 (see Lampert and Sanders 1971, Lampert and Hughes 1974, Cane 1988, Egloff 1992, Egloff, Navin and Officer 1995). Drawing on early historical sources, Lawrence (1968) has documented the central place of the marine environment and resources in indigenous habitat and economy on the south-east coast. His primary sources relate to Sydney, with minor references to Twofold Bay and the Illawarra, nevertheless, there is supporting evidence that the people of Jervis Bay and the Shoalhaven region shared similar subsistence patterns. At Botany Bay Captain Cook reported, 'shellfish is their chief support yet they catch other sorts of fish' (cited Lawrence 1968:139), while Phillip writes that, '...fish was their principal support' (1968:139). In 1789, Tench wrote, 'Fishing, indeed, seems to engross nearly the whole of their time, probably from its forming the chief part of a subsistence' (Tench 1789:48), while Barrington noted 'women are employed in the canoes with lines and hooks' and that 'men...dive and procure fish from the rocks...' Early visitors to Jervis Bay noted in 1791, 'many natives...and canoes on the beach' and in 1801, 'numerous bones of kangaroos, seals and fish...'. (Grant 1801:19) In 1826, Harper wrote of the Jervis Bay Aborigines, 'They are very idle and but seldom employed, except in fishing and hunting...' (cited Organ 1990:139). The material culture, fish hooks and other equipment and weaponry, observed by early colonists, also reflected specialisation in the marine environment (Lawrence 1968:155).

As previously noted, fishing and gathering remained a vital and continuous part of south coast Aboriginal culture and economy during the early colonial period and throughout the institutional era. Initially the sea shore held little interest for the colonists whose attention was focused on the pastoral potential of the land, however, it is certain that by custom and necessity, and in the absence of serious competition from Europeans, Aboriginal interests in the coastal zone flourished. Rich oral historical material is available to show continuity over time in fishing and gathering practice. People's sentimental reminiscences of childhood and other life phases, of people and of places, often revolve around those activities. Jerrinja men and women

recall the dependence of their families on seafoods during the Depression, war years and management days. Even after the instigation of social security benefits, the economic reliance remained strong, particularly in the slack periods, as it does today. 'A blackfella', so they say, 'will never starve by the sea'.

Fishing and gathering at Jerrinja are gender specific and, most commonly, gender segregated activities. Women fish, most often from the river, gather oysters and collect shellfish including pippies, periwinkles and conks. Men also fish, from the river and rock platforms, and may involve themselves in gathering, but harvesting lobsters, diving for abalone and commercial beach hauling are distinctly men's preserves.

Harvesting seafood is commonly, but not always, a social activity. Avid fishers, like Linda, may spend hours on their own in a dinghy catching fish. Children often accompany their mothers and aunts on their fishing and gathering expeditions. Usually more interested in splashing about in the shallows or playing games in the sand, they sometimes gather penniwinkles in cans, help to collect bait or are encouraged to take a turn with line and reel. 'Little Stephen knows how to fish now. He's five years old. He's had a line since he was three and a half.' At Crookhaven Heads, small sheltered inlets provide safe environments where children learn to swim and are taught about the marine environment, its resources and its dangers.

Koori fishermen are the inheritors of a rich store of knowledge relating to tides and weather patterns, fish, their habitat and behaviours and other environmental indicators, such as the blooming of certain flowers, which serve as timing guides for the seasonal movements of particular fish species or the life cycles of oysters. Techniques for fishing and gathering and knowledge of favourite fishing grounds are passed from generation to generation.

Some prohibitions relating to the taking and consumption of seafoods are observed. A National Parks and Wildlife Service report based on interviews at Jerrinja in the 1970s, records that the taking of jew fish was not permitted, although this prohibition was not mentioned to me and jewfish were certainly caught and consumed during the period I was there. I have been told about a ban on taking pregnant animals; one



should not take spawning oysters which are disdained as tasting horrible and causing bellyache. On the other hand, fish with roe are prized by the Jerrinja commercial fishermen because they fetch high prices at market. A taboo on cooking fish after dark is mentioned by some but not strictly followed. Barrington records such a ban in Sydney in 1810, 'They never broil fish at night, because they think the wind will blow a contrary way to what they want it.' (Barrington 1810).

The primary prohibition in respect of fishing mentioned today relates to the precept that one should not take more than is necessary. A recurrent theme in any discussion with Jerrinja people about harvesting seafood is conservation. 'We're not greedy... we only take what we need'. There is some ambivalence as to whether taking fish for money is ethical, but even the commercial fishermen stress their conservative practices. Boodgie, a critic of commercial fishing, recalls how in the past everyone just took enough for a feed.

That's why there was an abundance of everything. Today there's too much greed they take everything. Koories or gubbahs? I asked. Yeah. All tarred and feathered the same. Villains.

Some have cast the conception of indigenous people as conservationists as an appropriation of western environmentalism, however, while some Aboriginal people have perceived benefits in promoting themselves within western frames and in forging alliances with the environmental movement, such attitudes are rooted in tradition. The compunction about overtaxing natural resources is sometimes expressed in esoteric terms,

We were over at Comerong catching blackfish, left, right and centre. The water went cold; the wind was still. We don't know if it was a bird or a man singing out, 'No more fish, no more fish'. Suddenly, there were no more bites. We looked at each other. Then it sounded like it was getting closer. We got the boat off the flat. When we got back the north-east blew. I never been back for blackfish again.

Another practice which finds its roots in tradition is the sharing of the harvest. Seafood is often shared within and between different families. The commercial crew's catch is distributed through broad family networks.

I would speculate that in fact the capitalist ethic remains weak in most Jerrinja people's involvement in fishing or collecting for sale. 'I sell them (abalone) now and then, but mostly I eat them. I don't like selling them. Makes your mouth water.' Men and women gather seafood for sale reluctantly and generally to satisfy immediate needs, cigarettes, alcohol or petrol for instance. A bigger effort might be involved when a car needs repairs, or a daughter needs a new dress for the debutantes' ball. The licensed fishing crew is a little different; they reinvest some funds in jeeps, nets and row boats. But the operation remains basic, their fishing is sporadic, catches are shared to some extent and they seem largely inspired by a passion for the occupation and a sense of history. At the time I was at Jerrinja, new licensing regulations and marine park laws represented a threat to Aboriginal rights to fish; 'if they banned me from fishing in the next say two or three years or the next 12 months or whatever,' said Frank, 'It'd sort of make me cry...Every year, its not one year gone by since I've started I've missed.'

Frank heads up the Jerrinja commercial fishing crew and for him fishing is his life. 'I'd like to fish whenever I'm going'. Whenever the fish might be running he's out there, at Jervis Bay, and those times, when no-one else would come with him, he'd 'just sit there and look at the fish going and think.' He says it reminds him of when he took his old uncle out there one time, 'I took Coomie out there when I started. Coomie sat there and cried...Old fellas, their minds would go back... Uncle Frank Wellington spotted for me when I started. He never learnt that off white men. That was in him.'

Passions for fishing and gathering are deep and abiding. There are some who would be happiest if they could spend nearly all their time by the river or sea. Cheryl who lives in town is drawn regularly back to Jerrinja to see relatives but also to pursue her favourite activity of oystering. Cheryl will spend long hours down in the mud flats chipping oysters off the rocks, not particularly for the feed at the end of it, but for the

activity itself. It is an activity she finds deeply satisfying. 'I could do this all the time' she says, 'I'm a real oysterwoman'.

People take pride in their skills and knowledge of fishing, gathering and diving, and their prowess is a source of some prestige. Individuals are acknowledged for their technical skills and savvy and for their commitment and productivity; certain men are famed for diving, admired for being able to go deep and stay down long. Old people may still be flattered for earlier renown. Those who are no longer physically capable of going fishing lament their inabilities and reminisce,

Nothing used to stop me from walking down the rocks opening oysters. Now I can't. I can't even walk. I used to love fishing. I used to go down here (riverfront) for blackfish.

Most people's happiest childhood memories seem to be tied up with fishing and gathering. In an account which demonstrates strong continuities in Jerrinja fishing practices over time, ex-Jerrinja resident Jean Wellington reminisces,

We loved going fishing and going oystering and that...We used to just walk down the front there and go fishing. Or go down the Heads, looking for muttonfish, abalone they call it. And mussels, and oysters and penniwinkles, all those sort of things, conks...we'd go out to the beach too. Make a day of that, we'd go out the beach digging pippies...We'd go out there and dig pippies and take bread and that and light a fire and cook the pippies up. Oh, they were, they were good days...

Yes, we used to fish along the, down on the rocks down the front there, you know, we call 'em dykes, always used to call them dykes, down the dyke and that was our main, our most good fishing spot. And there was a bluehole there, near the dykes and we used to always get around there, kids, and fish in the bluehole, because we'd catch a lot of flathead. They'd come in, you know, and get in this bluehole and it'd be high tide and when it'd go down low tide, we'd fish. And the men and folks and that used to fish off the rocks for blackfish, with their rods and that...And the ones that had boats, like, we used

to go out and drift in the channels for flathead and bream and that, mmm, handline. So we had good times when we were growing up.

Fishing is sentimentally entwined with memories of particular old people from whom skills were learned. Kanga recalls his uncle Mervyn Connolly,

My poor old uncle showed me a few (lobster) nests...I used to go with him all the time...His wet suit was a pair of pyjamas, long johns...He didn't use glasses, just put his foot in. If there was a Wobbegong in there, he'd just pull it out. 'Where there's a wobbie, there's a lobbie.' Edward (Kanga) Connolly.

Some express the feeling that when they fish they are following in the footsteps of their ancestors. 'Fishing 'sort'a brings back the old sort'a feelings, you know. Because all the old timers done them, these things...' Jerrinja people assert a right to fish based on the fact that it is something 'their people' have always done. 'Our people have been coming here for years, generations.' It is a right they see as being unjustly infringed upon by increasing fisheries regulation.

When a new Aboriginal Arts and Crafts project was started at Huskisson, some Jerrinja residents were recruited as artists under an employment program. They were given some instruction in painting, a central Australian influenced, pictorial dot style the main technique. Geraldine saw the painting as a means of expressing Koori culture. She recounts a conversation with the instructor as she sought to find a theme for her paintings,

When I first started off in this... Darren said, 'What do you want to paint?

I said, 'I'm a pippy (woman) - I go pippyng'.

'Do you want to do a pippy painting?'

And I said, 'can I?' and he said, 'Yeah!' So I did a little. ..I did a pippy painting...I don't know the traditional thing, way out that way, but we just do the sea, crabs, dolphins...but mostly I did pippyng, I did gathering...To me those paintings represent what I did when I was a kid on the sea, not out in the bush...

For the majority of Australians fishing and gathering is important principally as a recreational activity. For the Jerrinja, it represents a lifestyle, an economic necessity, a dietary staple, a focus of social relations, and a cultural activity central to their history and identity as Koories.

The development of closer government regulation over the marine environment and resources is increasingly serving to outlaw and constrain Jerrinja fishing and gathering practice. In pursuing patterns of harvest that have been an unremarked norm over generations, Jerrinja residents now find themselves operating in contravention of various State laws concerned with bag limits, size regulations, prohibitions on the harvest of certain species, licensing laws and environmental protection zones. People are forced to modify and limit their activities in accordance with the laws, or pursue them surreptitiously, with the risk of running foul of the law and finding themselves charged and convicted - as they intermittently are - with offences. In the face of these difficulties some residents have chosen to forego fishing and gathering activities altogether, 'I wouldn't want to give them the pleasure of catching me'. Some of the laws have been particularly sorely felt. The restriction, and then the total prohibition, on the taking of pippies has been a source of significant frustration; the preclusion of Aboriginal people from taking more than a minimum of abalone, by licensing laws which have seen the value of commercial licences, now exceeding a million dollars, is seen as a blatant travesty of justice; while proposals for a marine conservation zone in Jervis Bay represent a threat to Jerrinja commercial fishermen's means of income and way of life. There is a strong perception that these increasing laws are a new mode of persecution directed at Aboriginal people - 'I reckon they brought in the licensing laws just to get rid of the blacks.'; they must certainly be seen as a continuing chapter in their dispossession.

The following vignette, 'About the Bundles', will foreshadow my discussion of spiritual beliefs at Jerrinja, while also serving to extend the reader's acquaintance with the particularities, personalities and interwoven themes of Jerrinja life and identity.



## Vignette: ABOUT THE BUNDLES

A sense of mystery and magic surrounded the Bundles from my first acquaintance. I never met them, of course, for they died many years ago. Lest you think there are no Bundles left at all, let me be clearer; I am talking here about the brothers Bobby, Kelly and Tom, or Weakener, as he was known. It was Nan Campbell who first spoke to me about them; they were her mother's brothers.

*I remember my old uncles. They never used to stay here on the mission; they lived out in the bush. No-one really knows where it was. Somewhere out Beecroft. We used to try and follow them but they wouldn't let us. They'd come and visit us now and then; bring fish for my mother. They knew a lot about the old ways. Doesn't matter where they were, they could always tell if something was wrong in the family.*

*There was one time, I was real sick. I was a teenager then and we were with dad, working on the dairy farm. I was lying in my bed when suddenly I got a fright; there, at the window, was a black snake. My uncle always used to carry that snake 'round in an old sack. About three or four hours later, I got up and I was better. Uncle'd boil up sarsparilla to make us medicine. I remember he would sit up all night with a sick little baby.*

Nan was the youngest of William and Ethel Wellington's children. A descendant of Maori labourers brought to work Berry's estate, William was born at Coolangatta in the 1880s; Ethel (nee Bundle), a local Aboriginal woman, was born at Roseby Park, probably in the final decade of the century. The two married in 1915 at Nowra and raised their family at Roseby Park, though they moved about sometimes so that William could get work. There were seven children in all. Today, the majority of families at Jerrinja are descended from this family. During my time there, four of these family groups were still presided over by Nan and her surviving siblings. The name Bundle is held dear, as the link which provides a traditional right to the land. *We're the real people, original, I was told, not Johnny-come-latelies.*



There is no-one at Jerrinja now that goes by the Bundle name, though there are Bundles about town and further afield. Gwen was born a Bundle, but she married a Reid, from Gulargumbone. Gwen's father was a Bundle - *Ted, last of the Bundles*, so they say. He was another mystery. *I think he might have been an American Negro* - someone told me - *he was that black and tall*. That suggestion didn't get far with others, but he was not one of the brothers, Ethel's brothers, and the nature of the relationship had me perplexed. It was explained to me once that Ted was the brother of Nan's grandmother, a fact I found difficult to reconcile in terms of ages and generations. Gwen was so horrified by one attempt I had made to make sense of the genealogy that I decided to let the matter lie for a time. Perhaps I would ask Nan. Gwen was still a child when Ted left to join the circus. He died while on the road, some place in Victoria.

If I was looking to talk to Nan, I'd find her where she is most days, sitting in the corner of her loungeroom by the window, keeping a watchful eye on what's going on about the mission - one half of it, at least. Being at the end of a cul-de-sac, Nan has an almost complete view of the street and the houses lining either side. All the homes she can see, except the mansions which look down from the road above, are occupied by members of Nan's extended family. To the right an empty block merges into Frank's backyard, full with jeeps, boats, nets and all the other bits of flotsam and jetsam that a fisherman accumulates over the years. To the left is Valerie's, always a hub of activity. Nan watches Sam and Trudy saunter up the hill toward the Top House, where Norman is sitting enjoying some sun. In the distance, Linda's young neds, Leslie and Robert are roaming about, probably playing havoc with someone's fruit trees. Angela appears running; hop, skips and jumps across the potholed road and dashes into her grandmother, Gwen's. Minutes later she emerges, loaf of bread in hand, takes a flying leap off the verandah and sprints home. Topsy, returning from her daily trek to Eileen's, cuts across Nan's yard and disappears through the gap in the palings. No-one is hurrying to fix the hole. Most fences here lie in varying states of disrepair; life at Jerrinja calls for more fluidity than good fencing would allow. I make my way via Frank's.

Looking back on the days of the mission managers, Nan is filled with mixed emotions. She grows nostalgic, sometimes, *that was the good old times then*. *We*

*were happy living the way we were. I'll say we were better off then than we are today. At other times, she rails. We never had a life of our own. We had to slave for the white managers. They used to send us little picanninies for gum tips. We had to scrub the bathroom, toilet and laundry for them. My poor old Uncle Bobby used to go fishing at the lighthouse. He was a great fisherman; always got them. I don't know how he did it. Mr Smithers, from the Protection Board, would say he wanted a snapper. He'd only say it and Uncle Bobby would go and get one. I'd ask him, "Why are they 'pending on you unc?" "I don't know daught."*

*Our people were here before the reserve, it was an oft-repeated refrain and the basis for the sense of pre-eminence that Nan and her family felt they had over others on the mission. I was only buying it in a general kind of way - that the land had been part of their people's traditional estate - for hadn't I read in the history books that the reserve had been established to relocate Aboriginal families from the old Coolangatta estate. It took more books to change my mind. At the Mitchell Library it was there in black and white that Jack Carpenter, his wife Judy, Jimmy Bundle, Lucy and Chip were all well and truly resident at Crookhaven recreation ground in the latter 1800s.*

The story begins, of course, much earlier. So far as the historical records are concerned it seems the name Bundle makes its first appearance in the historical record in 1809 in notable company. A Sydney Gazette report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> September identifies Young Bundle as one who with the resistance figure Tedbury, son of Pemulwuy, was responsible for an attack on two white settlers at Parramatta. In the following year Young Bundle met with Governor Macquarie on his tour of the Cowpastures, being listed amongst other natives "who honoured us with their company and attendance". Bundle was a familiar figure at Throsby's Bong Bong property and sometimes served as a guide to the south coast. It was Bundle who reported a massacre of Aboriginal people in the Illawarra in 1818.

Nan greets you with a luminous, twinkling, crinkling in the corners sort of smile that makes you feel for a moment the little bluebird of happiness has just lighted on your shoulder. *How are you daught?* We settle down to talk. *My nephew, Mervyn, was going to show me, one time, where my uncles lived. He used to follow them about. He said, "Come on aunt, I'll show you", but I never went. I wish I knew where it was,*



*I'd fight for that place"* - as if she hadn't already. For years she has been involved in the struggle for land rights and at Jervis Bay she came close to arrest, protesting government plans for a naval base.

Although it bothered Nan that she didn't know where, exactly, her uncles had lived, the real problem was that Nan felt herself left out of a secret of altogether greater proportions. They - the older generations - had all conspired to silence. They had never let her in on their way - the culture way. The old people knew the lingo; they used to talk amongst themselves. Nan recalls with dismay how her grandmother used to chase her away. *She was very strict. Old grandmother had favourites; I wasn't very welcome, used to get tossed away.* Stretching and massaging the fingers of her poor hand with the other, Nan searches for reasons and judges herself unworthy. *I must have been cheeky, too forward. We got around with a lot of white people. That's what took it out of me. Instead of sticking to our own ways. It made grandmother wild.*

But sometimes, on reflection, she landed the ball back in the other court. *This is where a lot of our old people falled down. They wouldn't let you listen. They should have sat down and told us stuff. Instead of learning us, they'd get nasty with us. They should have left us the culture; instead they took it away with them.*

Nan and her family say they feel more at home on Beecroft than on the mission. On weekends and school holidays they'll pack up the car with tents and billies and fishing lines and kids and go out to camp at Honeymoon (now Bindijine), sometimes for weeks on end. It's about being in the bush, enjoying the sea, relaxing, recharging and connecting with their spiritual inheritance.

We were at Honeymoon Bay when Nan told me she thought the mermaids might've had something to do with her uncles' life in the bush. *I think they might have got to my uncle. They could've had him out here sitting with them.* Like the *bit-bit* women, if the mermaids took a fancy to someone, they would call them - *wangalang* - put them under a spell. The *bit-bit* women were especially tricky. Beautiful, with long dark hair, they would come onto the mission and even roam the streets of Nowra; but you could tell - if you were looking - because their feet were pointy. I asked Gwen

about them. *Lovely jet black hair, down to their feet, long fingernails. Brrr, you make me creepy now, Nat. They reckon they used to charm the men. If they wanted the men they charmed them, just like Jedda. Charm them away.*

I imagine that when they were young the Bundle women, Nan, Eileen and Sylvia, all had beautiful long black hair<sup>1</sup>. All three still wear their hair loose and long and carefully combed, though they are silvery headed now. Eileen looks a lot like Nan, but she has a restrained and almost regal air. My guess is that she was one of the favourites that Nan spoke of.

I know very little about her - Eileen - except that her life seems to have been filled with sorrows and losses. Eileen herself has lived to a good age. She is strong, having survived challenges to her own health. But all around, people close to her, those she loved, have not had the same endurance and have succumbed to prolonged illness or been suddenly wrenched away. In the face of it all, Eileen remains stoic, but it seems somehow that she hides herself behind closed doors.

I was never certain what sort of reception I would get when I paid a call at Eileen's, so it was always with some trepidation that I closed the gate of the high paling fence behind me, and approached the door. I knocked, not too hard, and waited. Quite often the door remained unanswered, but today - *What do you want?* The door opened an inch or two. *I was wondering if Dallas was home. Asleep. Eileen? Resting. Can you tell them I'll come back another day?*

For reasons I never did fathom, there were days when I was warmly welcomed, when Eileen talked freely, and, on those rare days, I practically floated out the door. To say that Eileen spoke freely must be seen in relative terms, for she always spoke guardedly, with conspiratorial gravity. She told me one day how her Uncle Bobby had taken her with him, out to Beecroft Peninsula. He had stopped at a particular place in the bush, and instructed her to stay there, not to move. He had disappeared then, returning after a time with - to her amazement, since he carried no line - a huge

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<sup>1</sup> The sisters Eileen and Sylvia have since passed away.



snapper in his hands. Her uncles, she said, had lived out there, but they moved around, didn't stop the one place. She mentioned a cave at Target Beach.

*I don't go out there, to Beecroft, she meant. I won't go there. I don't know about those things.* In weighty tones Eileen told me many times over. It took me some time to understand, if I ever did, Eileen's taciturnity. For Eileen, Beecroft was filled with dangerous and mystical powers which one could not afford to mess with. Warnings issued by her uncles to keep away from certain sites remained vividly in her mind. Eileen knew, I'm sure, more than she spoke about, but there were serious questions for her about what she had the right to speak of and to whom.

Gwen told me about childhood visits out to Beecroft too. *Them old elders, well they made a track through the bush. It was a short cut. I don't know, I s'pose that's all fenced in now on account of old Halloran has got all that land in there now, everything.* In those days the fishermen from the mission would set up camp out at Target. If it was a Sunday or school holidays, when they came back for food supplies, they might take the children back out for the day. *We'd end up getting in trouble. We used to go dorrying around, looking for things we shouldn't do. We found a footprint in the rock. Bundoola<sup>2</sup>. Everytime you went near it, you can bet your bottom dollar we'd have rain... They told us we shouldn't have gone up there because we brought bad weather for the fishermen. Thunderstorms, hail and everything.* I must admit that in all the time I was at Jerrinja the similarity between the names Bundoola and Bundle never once occurred.

It was from an unexpected quarter that I learned more about the Bundles. 'Though second time round he had 'married' a Wellington, Boodgie occupied a peripheral position on the mission - as far as the politics went, at least. Raised at Orient Point, Boodgie grew up in close contact with Roseby Park, but not on it. His mother was a Koori woman, with family on the mission; on his father's side, Boodgie was descended from pioneer settler stock: the Caffreys, who grew corn on the Point and the Lonesboroughs, who first settled Goodnight Island. Boodgie followed closely in the footsteps of his father. *My life was similar to old dad's*, he told me, *tone's of*

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<sup>2</sup> Versions of the Bundoola story have been published in Organ 1990. A local account was given to me

affection in his voice, *net fishing and oyster farming*. He had even inherited his father's nickname, *Boodgerigoo*, a name bestowed by the old Koories, meaning good fella. Perhaps heir too to his warm heart and cheeky sense of humour. Boodgie's father lived to a ripe old age, swearing by his rum tonic and bicycle riding. Boodgie himself was dying of cancer.

His stories brought the Bundles to life:

*I've often seen them out in Jervis Bay spearing groper through the tail. They're coming around on the rocks see, the high water, feeding, their tails up in the air. And they'd (the old Koories) sneak out, from about here to there and whoosh, bang! The old spear...right through the tail, he can't swim away. Oh I've often seen that...*

*Nuggett and I followed them when we was kids - the voice is full of life and expression - and, oh god, we got that far away they couldn't hunt us back, so they took us with 'em. Oh god, they cut sugar bags and wrapped them around our legs 'cause all the spiky seeds...Went right out around the caves and everything, getting honey out of the caves. Oh god, we never followed them again...it nearly killed us. (We were gone) a week...I nearly got killed when I come home. Mother was going to kill me, didn't know where I was. (I had an) uncle there, he was in amongst it too see, her brother. Yeah, he was there too, Jimmy Dixon...That was him, Jimmy Dixon. I followed him and Billy Carpenter...There was a lot of Carpenters there. Two or three Bundles...Oh there was a team of them. They'd all have a bit of flour, some'd have flour, some'd have sugar, tea. Never starved, plenty of honey. Shoot a wallaby, cook him on the coals. Spear a fish...*

On certain days the tremor of distant bombing carries through the air, rattles the windows at Jerrinja and unsettles the hearts of Nan and her family. For decades Beecroft Peninsula, sacred home of Bundoola and the place where Nan's uncles spent their time has been a naval bombing range. In the past the ammunition was live; great pieces of rock were torn from the land and successive fires ravaged the bush. Now the range doubles as a conservation reserve and, on the days when orange flags are

raised against entry, the shells fired are dummies. Not that this offers much consolation to the Koories from Jerrinja who find themselves excluded and managed variously by naval and national park laws. A family like Nan's though, is not about to take this lying down. The rangers came one day asking for camping fees and challenging them about having dogs. Mervyn jumped up - he'd been sleeping off the Mosie - *Who are you? Captain Cook's grandson? I've got sixty dogs at home and if I want to bring 'em, I'll bring 'em and live in the bush.* And the battle to reclaim the Bundle inheritance was not about to end there.

### **The enchanted world: spiritual beliefs at Jerrinja**

Anthropology may take some credit for the fact that, in turning serious and respectful attention to Aboriginal religious beliefs, knowledge and institutions (eg. Stanner 1966, Berndt 1974), practitioners like Stanner and Berndt have contributed to important shifts in mainstream Australian attitudes toward indigenous people and their culture, and have led to certain recognitions by the State of Aboriginal rights to land. Our profession must, on the other hand, take part of the responsibility for what is, arguably, an undue overemphasis on spirituality, in conceptions of Aboriginality, and in notions of Aboriginal landedness generally, which, when coupled with a professional scepticism, or lack of attention to their persistence, in the contemporary south-east and similar contexts, has contributed to the widespread assumption that the Aborigines of settled Australia are not 'real' Aborigines.

Outside the context of Native Title research, one needs to go a some distance back (see Reay 1945, 1949, Hausfeld 1960, Calley 1964) to find accounts of Aboriginal spiritual belief amongst Aborigines in settled Australia. Even a volume dedicated to continuities in Aboriginal culture, Keen's *Being Black*, gives scant attention to the matter, the article by Barnes representing something of an exception (1988). Where urban Aboriginal people express spiritual understandings, academics might be as likely to treat them with profound scepticism, knowing condescension or damn them as peddling in invention and lies (c.f. Keeffe 1988). The presumption still seems to prevail that the secular is the only veritable point of focus. The obvious fact that Aboriginal religious practice and knowledge has been severely diminished in 'settled'



Australia should not blind us to the vitality of distinct Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. The following account is indicative; I do not profess to have seriously redressed this issue in my research. I would suggest that there is potential for further research into the issue; the connection between spirituality and issues of physical and emotional wellbeing might constitute one area worth pursuing.

The approach of dark, brewing clouds at Jerrinja will sometimes evoke the name of Bundoola, a local culture hero, envisaged by some as a sea serpent and imputed with supernatural powers over the weather. The onset of violent lightning stirs abject fear in some; at least one adult known to resort for protection in a cupboard. Stormy weather is supposed in local mythology to be signal of Bundoola's anger; flashes of lightning are the spears hurled by Bundoola in battle. Bundoola's wrath may be aroused by humans. If stones are rolled down the Devil's Hole, a site on Beecroft Peninsula, story has it that an enraged Bundoola will bring bad weather.

The average Australian lives in a thoroughly disenchanted world; the average Koori does not. Through Koori eyes, the 'geospace' commands a significance beyond what Europeans would call the mundane. At the very least, the landscape is understood, to be inhabited, in addition to humans and animals, by a range of extra-ordinary creatures and spirits, some benign, some maleficent, all the object of some apprehensiveness. The country itself is considered to have potency (some sites being particularly powerful or dangerous), it responds to human presence and action and it produces omens for human consciousness to be read, heard or experienced in the body. The original Aboriginal culture - conceptualised in the past and in remote Australia <sup>3</sup> - is understood to have harnessed mystical and paranormal powers and these continue to be recognised as a source of both danger and of possible empowerment.

*Dooligarls* or little hairy men are believed to inhabit the bush, sleeping in caves or hollow logs and coming out at night to scavenge for food, especially fish<sup>4</sup>. Some same the reason you should not cook after dark is that it might attract *dooligarls*.

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<sup>3</sup> In which even Dubbo is included.

<sup>4</sup> Note that Howitt describes *tulugals* as creatures living in trees, rocks or caves in his 1904 book.

Although descriptions vary somewhat, *dooligarls* are supposed to be small, hairy, human-like creatures,

They run around now, little hairy men...I don't know if any *gubbahs* have sort of like seen 'em, but blackfellas do see 'em...He stands like a man...Just all hairy...Hairy, like apes, but long hair, real long hair, hanging all over their face (Rhonda Connolly).

Everyone seems to have a dooligarl story. Here, Frank Connolly tells a story about *dooligarls* raiding the leftovers of an evening meal at Jervis Bay,

Neville, like, my brother there, he used to camp a lot, y'know, years ago, out what they call Honeysuckle, that's up near Cabbo [Cabbage Tree] Creek. Used to camp 'til they see it...'til they see it, y'know. That was it. Packed up...Neville he seen...he reckon there was a family of 'em, because when the fella was, must have been the male fella, himself, he was sort of singing out for the other one to come closer. And he seen the other one come over to the pan, see, scratching into the pan. They was sort of singing out like a kookaburra, copying it, y'know...Then there was more in the bush, must have been his family, see must've had little ones. I don't know. But Neville was off home the next day. Soon as it got light, he packed the gear and they never stopped until they got to this mission. Yeah. And he's never camped on his own again there.

Few Koories feel comfortable alone in the bush, especially at night - 'you wouldn't catch me'. Adults might joke to children that the *doolies* will get them, but are themselves extremely wary. Two women were disconcerted one day as we walked toward Comerong Beach to gather pippies. A bad smell lingered over the bush track and they suspected it was a *dooligarl* - 'one of the lads' - 'they say they're bad (smelling)'<sup>5</sup>. They hurried on. A feeling of being watched over is also thought to signify the presence of *dooligarls*. During an evening barbeque at Crookhaven

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<sup>5</sup> Mathew's recounts tales of the *mumuga* a *Thurawal* monster, very strong and hairy with short arms and legs, 'He cannot run very fast, but when he is pursuing a blackfellow he evacuates all the time as he runs, and the abominable smell of the ordure overcomes the individual, so that he is easily captured.

Heads, a place said to be a haunt of *dooligarls*, some young teenagers I was with spent most of the night sitting in the car, claiming they had seen red eyes staring out at them from the bush.

In most accounts the *dooligarl* is depicted as fairly harmless, 'They wouldn't hurt you. They're just looking for a feed, that's all.' A more malevolent version of the hairy man, one who captures and eats small children, has been alluded to in the earlier rendition of Ruthy's story. Ruthy told the tale of a hairy man of this type who lost his wife at Comerong. She wanted to get away from him and swam out to sea toward a big boat. He was singing out to her on the beach in his own language. The hairy man was scared of water, but he kept paddling out, eventually drowning himself in his efforts to reach her<sup>6</sup>. Reminiscences of this story can be found in a contemporary account about a Jerrinja woman who was being chased by a *dooligarl* at Lake Wollumboola. She took to the water, because *dooligarls* don't like water, and was up to her waist in it when she came face to face with him.

Evil *bit-bit* women are also believed to haunt Jerrinja country, living in the bush by the ocean and waiting to allure men into their clutches<sup>7</sup>. A six year old girl recounted the *bit-bit* story: 'A boy who went to bed late heard his name being called. If you fish too late you can hear your name.' A woman recounted how her grown-up son had heard his name being called at Crookhaven Head; she said it had been a *bit-bit* woman trying to sing him. The story of the *bit-bit* woman who, many years ago, joined a circle of children playing on the mission was repeated to me by a number of people.

Most greatly feared amongst the supernatural beings are the *bugeenj* or *goonj*. If a *bugeenj* is after you, I was told, you should sleep naked because they can sniff out your clothes. If you see one you must hurry on and never look back. Although sometimes translated as ghost, the *bugeenj* are really clever men<sup>8</sup>, part human / part spirit who come intent on murder. Sighted from time to time, and appearing as old,

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(1904:345).

<sup>6</sup> Again to note a similarity, Mackenzie and Mathews describe the *Yaroma*, a hairy giant with short legs, strange long feet and a huge mouth, which enables him to swallow a man whole. A potential victim is able to escape by swimming away because the *Yaroma* cannot wet his feet (MacKenzie and Mathews reproduced in Organ 1990:lvii).

<sup>7</sup> At Jervis Bay there is a creek bearing the name Bid Bid Creek.

<sup>8</sup> One teenager described his encounter as being with a 'live person'.



traditional black Koories, sometimes naked or dressed in old black hat and overcoat, they are, apparently, the equivalent of Central Australian *kadaitja* men<sup>9</sup>. In that relation, people also speak of the 'feather-foot man', probably an equivalent of *bugeenj*, who is said to have feathers growing out of his feet and head and to have the power to transform himself. Nan Campbell recounts that her grandmother was killed by a *bugeenj* and says that one had come in the night after her husband as well but that, being 'a bit clever himself', he had sensed the attacker's presence and warded him off. Koories are extremely suspicious if they see an unknown Aboriginal person in town and are always told to avoid strangers. The power of 'tribal' Aborigines is held in awe and greatly feared.

The landscape is also thought to be haunted by the spirits of Aboriginal ancestors, the 'old people' and those more recently deceased. Jerrinja people believe that spirits of the dead may revisit them. Nan Campbell explains,

(The old people) learnt us in a spiritual way more than anything else. Like deathways - if you lose someone remember that people come back to you. A lot of us remember that. It happens. They always come home and have a look at you. See if you're alright. They come to you in a spiritual way. We had someone the other night...

The spirits of the dead may also present as animal familiars. One man who had passed away was believed to return in the form of a grasshopper to communicate messages to his family. John Longbottom believes his father was reincarnated as a black snake. Alexander Berry observed, in his memoirs of the Shoalhaven, that the souls of deceased Aboriginal 'chiefs' were believed to inhabit the bodies of porpoises after death (Backhouse in Organ 1990:209). Nan Campbell told me, 'Dolphins try to tell us things. That's our old people coming home.'

Jerrinja people believe that premonitions and omens may warn them of someone's impending death. To see a willy wag tail dancing is a sign of death. The call of the *duwon* bird is another sign of foreboding. People describe bodily sensations or

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<sup>9</sup> Howitt refers to the Yuin category of *bukin* or fat-takers.

feelings which warn of sickness and death. While I was at Jerrinja, one young man returned from Sydney saying he had a feeling that someone was dying, had died, or was sick. On first returning, he connected it to his mother's reports that she had been missing and crying for him, but on the following day his great-grandfather's younger wife died suddenly. His aunt said that she too had experienced strange tingling feelings from her toes to her head in forewarning.

Knowledge about the mythical significance of the landscape, or certain of its features - sometimes detailed, often vague - is retained in the oral traditions of some families and is the subject of considerable secrecy. Several mythological and cultural sites are located at Beecroft Peninsula (Bundarwa), most of them associated with Bundoola. Even in cases where detailed knowledge of sites has been lost, the sense that they are powerful and dangerous remains. Older people recall stern prohibitions laid down by their elders, 'We wasn't allowed to walk along near the Duck Hole...Dads and old uncles used to say, Don't youse go near that waterhole.' Certain restrictions remain in place - 'Aunty took us round there. We only went to the corner. She said we couldn't go any further' - with visitations to sites provoking intense consternation on some accounts.

A number of people spoke of the danger of becoming ill through illegitimate visits or activity in respect of mythological or cultural sites. Reluctance on the part of an older man to show people sites at Jervis Bay was explained in terms of fears of sickness. Current and past instances of illness were interpreted in this light. Graham Connolly described how he and another man's feet had swollen up after they stumbled across a bora ground in Kangaroo Valley. One old woman reported having been overcome by a strange feeling during a visit to Jervis Bay and insisted that she would no longer go there. Her uncles had told her, she said, of places that she must not go and she had decided now to generalise the prohibition. She added, however, that it was actually alright for Jerrinja people to go there because it is their country. If other Koories trespassed, they would get sick and might die. *Gubbahs*, she said, are not affected. The land has a certain sentience and responds positively to the right human presence and activity. Shirley Connolly described an experience in which she said a waterhole had opened up to her on Beecroft Peninsula,

It showed to us that once. We never saw it again...It was really clean. In it was like blue and white marble. We been to that spot many times. Never seen it open up again. My old brother told me there's lots of waterholes there. You'll find them. They'll show to you.

Nan Campell ponders, 'You wonder why (Honeymoon Bay) always calls us back, my family. We'd come along the beach with little swags...Its calling all the time.'

Sacredness extends, in some minds, beyond sites of mythical and ceremonial significance to any site associated with the past presence and activity of Aboriginal forebears. Middens, rock shelters and artefact scatters are treated with reverence and felt by some to be spooky and dangerous.

Aboriginal spirituality is for some Jerrinja residents an integral part of the definition of self. Knowledge, a scarce and restricted resource, is an asset which lends authority and prestige, while it guides and constrains certain activities. Amongst some, especially older people, spiritual knowledge is closely guarded. There is a consciousness surrounding who is entitled to speak about what, and who is entitled to hear. As well as restrictions on the transmission of knowledge, there is also a recognition of responsibility to convey that knowledge, in the appropriate circumstances to up and coming generations. Spirituality is seen to tie people to the land and to connect them to the Aboriginal past and to the 'traditional Aboriginal' people of more remote parts of the country who are thought to have great access to mystic powers.

That a great part of the local religious knowledge has been lost is a matter for profound regret on the part of many Jerrinja residents. Nevertheless they still count their spirituality and spiritual beliefs as a basis for distinction from whites. Koories say they can see things and feel things and know things that whites don't or can't know about. An older man told me, 'It's a feeling thing. We know what's there, while others don't.' The land does not respond to white presence. Neither the positive spiritual presences nor the dangerous powers in the landscape are supposed, by many, to affect the white person. An old woman told me that while a strange

Koori is subject to negative influences, if he intrudes onto the wrong land, nothing happens to whites.

For all their unselfconscious expression of traditional spiritual belief and superstition, Jerrinja people are extremely intimidated when comparing themselves to the 'real' Aborigines. In a passage which reveals both her continuing belief in the esoteric powers of traditional Aboriginal culture and a profound lack of confidence and ambivalence about expressing her own Aboriginality through cultural mediums, Geraldine recounts a discussion with her mother-in-law which followed the screening of a television documentary on copyright issues surrounding Central Australian art. Her mother-in-law phoned,

'You better stop doing those stories out there on the paintings you're doing...the old tribal up there don't like it because you might be copying them'. 'No', Geraldine replied, 'we're just doing our own drawings, our own stories out of our heads.' I got a bit scared, and next minute the didgeridoo blew. True as God...And I said, 'Well that's the old blackfellas telling us not to do it. So I got up, I wouldn't paint that day...' She says she consulted with one of the instructors, 'Are we allowed to do this? Or are we - gotta get permission off those people before we can do this.' See 'cause that's their tradition, that they made up. I'm still very scared about doing it. Well whether they want us to do it - ...But we're all Aboriginal people. Thing is they haven't got the rights...'cause they're tribal people, they haven't got the rights to tell us not to do. We all Aboriginal people, we got to show our culture, haven't we.

### **Private ethnicity**

While some aspects of Aboriginal culture have been made conscious symbols for public consumption and political expediency, there are others that belong in the domain of 'private ethnicity' (Weaver 1984:182). There are certain ways of knowing and ways of doing that people feel make them or reveal them as Koori. If you watch someone at Jerrinja, make a fire, for instance, you will see, as they lever and snap a log between trees, or gather certain grass for kindling or blow on it just so, a certain

sense of competence and pride. The importance of fire in constructions of self and home were revealed, when the houses were renovated, in Nan's refusal of a new slow-combustion in place of the fire place. From Nan's perspective the hearth was integral to the home, a centre of the living space, a place around which people gathered, cooked occasionally and, in winter, sometimes slept. I asked Geraldine, one day, how you know you're a Koori,

You know why? You've got it inside of you. You know sometimes I feel like I want a fire. I'll go outside and I'll make a little fire. And I'll sit at the fire and you could feel...even in the city or anywhere. Eileen used to do it at Errol Bay...She said, 'This little feeling'd come over me and I'd want to go outside and light a fire', and the old bloke used to live next door and he said, 'What you doing Eileen, lighting a fire this time of night?' And she said, 'No, that's my way budda, that's the Koori in me, we gotta have a little fire going and this...and you feel at peace with yourself.' He said, 'What? I'll have to tell Jack about you in the morning,' he'd say laughing about it. Oh, so she said, 'Tell Jack, he knows. I make a little fire all the time'. She said, 'I might live all around where you whitefellas are but I can go out and make my little fire'. She said to me, 'Don't you feel like that Gero?

No doubt, as Morris has argued such things, that were at one time 'unconscious and unreflexive acts of everyday life', have been made 'conscious and conspicuous' in the context of cultural domination (1989:74). But if they acquire additional meaning and purpose as symbols of difference and resistance, they also remain substantively the offspring of long traditions of practice and sentiment whose meaning and value reside solidly beyond the realm of opposition.

## Conclusion

A story recounted by Geraldine, and set against a critique of the absent mother, gives an image, I would argue, of what for her is an ideal enactment of Aboriginality; I do not contend it is the only one, for she certainly entertains others of more radical bent. The story is set 'down the front' of Jerrinja, by the river,

So Courtney, being the eldest (about ten), she went and gathered the oysters and you know what, I could've cried Natalie. She made the little fire, she went up and she got the bread and the drink and that for 'em. She made the little fire and all her little brothers and sisters were sitting around in a circle and she was sitting opening them an oyster each and bread.

The story contains the motifs of family, caring, sharing, harvest and consumption of seafood, of being in the bush or riverfront away from the mission, fire and poverty, whose value has been explicated in this, and the preceding chapter, and which form key elements of Geraldine's own sense of self. There is little doubt, that outside the context of colonial encapsulation, certain elements of the scene would not hold the same significance they do, yet I would set this image - which represents both ideal and ordinary scenario in everyday life for some Jerrinja residents - in contradistinction to Cowlishaw's (2004) exhortation that anthropologists and Aborigines should locate indigenous alterity in colonial rage. Although perhaps overbearing and of critical importance, worlds at Jerrinja do not revolve solely around the oppressions of colonial domination and the struggle for liberation. If some feel the urge to interpret this scene as a fantastic story of escape from the demands and sufferings of colonial domination; it is not only so. For as Geraldine would more readily tell you, for her it represents a sometimes needed escape from the intense and immediate demands of everyday household life (admittedly much perplexed by their marginal position), from taxing social obligations within broader family networks and from the political tensions and arguments inherent in mission life.

### Vignette: KYLIE'S BRACES

It didn't strike me as particularly remarkable that a woman of twenty-four should be wearing orthodontic braces. Kylie was one of a group of women with whom I often enjoyed company. She was lively in the group - although somewhat shy with me - and she had a reputation for being tough, a fact that was attested by her nickname, "Killer". The late morning gossip, which followed a bout of heavy drinking, would sometimes be enlivened with tales of Kylie having had some woman up against the wall or having drawn blood on old Punter, a white man who lived on the mission. She herself related a story to me that up at Legends, a dispute that began in the ladies between a white woman and herself, had carried over into the car park. Kylie leant into the woman's car and punched her, then dragged her out onto the ground and kicked her in the head. Kylie could be ferocious when it came to disputes relating to men or racial affronts, but her strongest venom was drawn in protecting her two little daughters.

Kylie liked to go into town dancing. Since I had a vehicle, my presence on the mission, presented new transport opportunities. Although on occasion, I reluctantly responded to late night knocks on the door by running people into town, most often, since I also like dancing, I was as enthusiastic as everyone else for a night out. At the appointed hour, I would drive around from house to house picking up passengers who had secured the promise of a ride. It was generally a protracted affair getting the chosen few (the van seated eleven) on board. With engine running, we waited outside while somebody finished their shower; somebody else hunted for their ID card. We drove here and there for a borrowed pair of shoes or to pick up money, owed or borrowed. Inevitably, I'd get impatient, sending messages for people to hurry up or if I got exasperated enough honk the horn. The latter was never lightly done. I was always conscious of drawing attention to our escapades, imagining disapproving frowns behind certain curtains. Finally the van was full and we hit the road for Nowra. The radio was tuned into Power FM to get us in the mood. The scent of freshly shampooed hair and Charmers perfume mingled with that of the beer that was consumed along the way. No one but me would consider going to Legends without being charged and without having money for drinks at the other end.



Quite often when we got to Legends, there would be some drama about getting in, generally revolving around somebody not having proof of age. Kylie always knew the bouncers at Legends and she usually got in for free. The Koories kept to themselves in the nightclub. There was generally a good contingent from the mission, as well as others from Wreck Bay and Nowra. People would gather around tables drinking and talking or stake out a space on the dance floor. When she was charged, Kylie became more friendly with me than usual. Once in a while she would give me a big hug and call me sis; my spirits soared. We often enjoyed a dance together, although I was always vaguely disconcerted that Kylie's dancing style was meant as a parody of white women's vanity, something in the style of voguing. Over excited on the dance floor, some *gubbahs* lost any sense of personal space and bumped jovially into others willy-nilly. Tensions on the Koori side bristled.

The drinking intensified at happy hour, when you could get two of a selected spirit for the price of one. "We all take it in turns to shout," I overheard one woman from our group explaining to someone, "except her" she said throwing a disparaging glance over her shoulder at me. My spirits plummeted.

Koori women generally took time to check out the talent, black and white. The end aim of a night in town amongst the single women was usually to score a man. Strategies to do so were always rather oblique. There would be admirations, whispers and winks between the women and urgings that someone should go and tell a man that such and such liked him. It never appeared to me that any real contact had actually been made, nevertheless my van was frequently short a few women or sometimes up a man or two on the homeward journey. Kylie quite often had her eye on someone at the club. She is an attractive woman, who took care to look her best on nights out in the town. Which is why, coming back to it, to my mind there was nothing baffling about the braces. It seemed obvious to me, that a belated decision to straighten crooked teeth had been made for cosmetic reasons.



I asked Kylie casually one day when the braces would be coming off. It became, suddenly, a moment of intense embarrassment for both of us. At that instant, I realised that there were no adjoining wires between the metal fixtures on Kylie's teeth. The wires which serve to draw the bite into the desired line were gone and the metal tracks remained cemented to the teeth as useless relicts. Kylie told me she had to go back to Wollongong, where she'd had them put on. I asked if I could help, thinking she might want a lift, but she told me she was going to get her aunt to organise it. I got the impression there must be a waiting list. I let the matter lie and soon after left Jerrinja, since my fieldwork had come to a close.

Now and then I go back to visit Jerrinja, to catch up with my friends or, as so often happens, to attend a funeral. It was nearly six months after I'd left that I first returned. I was surprised and concerned to see that Kylie was still wearing braces. I asked if she wanted my help, though realistically I was only on a flying visit. She declined. Another three to four months, back at Jerrinja again and the braces were still there. I was perturbed. Kylie had, I figured, been wearing the braces for the nearly two years I had known her and it was dawning on me that she might not have got braces late in life at all; that she had probably been wearing the things since her early teens when braces are usually prescribed. By now the braces presented an awkward obstacle in the relations between us. When she saw me, Kylie sought self-consciously to keep the braces hidden. She hardly spoke and her usual open grin was restrained behind pursed lips. I thought it might be best not to mention the subject but the unasked question seemed to speak louder still.

Orthodontists are prohibitively expensive, I reasoned. I looked up a local orthodontist in town, explained who I was, told 'Kylie's' story and asked whether he'd be prepared to remove the braces free of charge. He agreed, warning me that Koories don't necessarily share the bourgeois attitude of university students. Shrugging off his comments - it seemed to me that only orthodontists could want to have anything more than the minimum involvement with braces - I took his business card back to Kylie and explained she could make an appointment any time. Kylie seemed grateful, telling the other women

as we drove to Legends that night that I was helping her. I took off home the next day feeling rather pleased with myself.

It was, then, with astonishment and dismay that I returned to Jerrinja some months later to find the braces still firmly in place. The issue couldn't be broached. I felt I wasn't just making Kylie self-conscious about the braces anymore but that I was making a spectacle of her 'failure' to do anything about them. I felt compelled to take a long hard look at the matter. I asked myself if there *wasn't* something terribly 'bourgy' about my preoccupation with the braces? Was it a product of my own vanities? What of my presumption that I should somehow help? No matter which way I tried to look at it the braces seemed to me an affliction better rid. It seemed to me that braces were not particularly becoming in most people's books, but that aside, I reasoned, those spiky bits of metal must surely be irritating, if not painful. The habit Kylie had of running her tongue between her upper lip and teeth, over the braces, seemed to be indicative of some discomfort. Conducting a survey amongst friends who had worn braces I discovered that mouth ulcers are an inevitable accompaniment. I remembered another problem notorious with braces amongst those who had worn them at school - they were traps for food scraps, although admittedly this may not have presented the same problems in Kylie's case with the cross wires missing.

I tried to think of any investment Kylie could have in keeping them on. Perhaps they enhanced her tough image? Was she concerned that her teeth would be unevenly coloured? Was there some deep psychological issue beyond my ken - the urge to self-mutilation? I couldn't come up with anything convincing. Well, what was stopping her getting them off? Transport and financial reasons had come to mind earlier. Fear of dentists is generally widespread, and in this case, since she had hardly followed the prescribed course of action it could be especially daunting. This played a part, no doubt.

Finally, though, one explanation percolated through which came as a shock to me and which led me to a deeper understanding of Koories' being-in-the-world. As I came to see it, the thing that lay at the heart of the intransigence of the braces was 'shame' - a

profound shyness in the face of the white world. It was not that I had been blind to feelings of embarrassment, inadequacy and lack of confidence in many Koori's interactions in the mainstream, but, that Kylie found the idea of negotiating her way through and enduring an encounter of this type more difficult to bear than the prolonged physical discomfort and aesthetic stigma of braces, shifted the ground. For me, Kylie's braces became a new measure of the acute sense of alienation, stress and debilitating anxiety experienced by many Koories in an everyday world, which suddenly appeared startlingly white.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SHAME AND THE EMBODIMENT OF BOUNDARIES

Although they maintain a sphere of life which they may call their own, Jerrinja people are inexorably incorporated into and dependent upon the institutions of dominant Australian society. By virtue of this fact, their participation in the mainstream is necessary, varied and sustained. However, every transaction in the mainstream is racially charged and every encounter serves to reinforce the divide. The first aim of this chapter is to show how the everyday and mundane nature of interaction in the mainstream belies intense feelings of unease, discomfort and anxiety experienced by many Jerrinja residents in negotiating this divide and to demonstrate that these feelings are precipitated by and signal of a Koori sense of shame. The second aim is to explain the origins of the emotion and the third to discuss its effects, which I will argue have profoundly ambivalent value.

#### Shame and cultural difference

In 1949 Marie Reay recorded that, in the town of Bourke and in other north-western New South Wales towns, traditional Aboriginal languages and customs were being discouraged by the scoffing and jeering of young 'mixed bloods' ridiculing the practices of the old-timers (1949:90, 96). 'The old men complain,' Reay observed, 'that if they sing aboriginal songs openly in the camp the other mixed-bloods "might think they're rude" and jeer at them as "filthy-minded old blackfellers" ' (Reay 1949:96).

If such evidence has been taken – as it has with grave consequences in the courts - as proof of a fatal disjuncture in Aboriginal culture, a reexamination of the same events focused on emotional content might lead to alternative conclusions. What role we might ask has shame played in this scenario and what type of 'selves', as Rosaldo has prompted

us to explore, is this feeling helping defend? (1983:136). What continuities are to be found in the unbearable sensitivity of the players, young and old alike, to scorn; in the contagion felt from the image of others in the construction of self; in the deployment of shame as a technique in enforcing conformity? A focus on emotions is, as Marcus and Fischer have observed, 'a way of getting to the level at which cultural differences are most deeply rooted: in feelings and in complex indigenous reflections about the nature of persons and social relationships' (1986:45).

This is, of course, no simple story of sequestered cultural difference. The contours of shame mark out the difficult moral terrain in which the lives of Jerrinja's residents are lived. Contemporary Koori subjectivities are constructed in a cross-fire of conflicting meanings and values in which hegemony holds both blatant and insidious sway. Emotion then brings us not only to new worlds of meaning but to complex fields of social action and political influence. Emotions are found not only to have cultural, social and political origins but cultural, social and political efficacy.

Two recent works beyond the discipline of anthropology have drawn attention to the phenomenon of shame experienced by Aboriginal people in the mainstream Australian context. Rosamund Dalziell (1999) explores the place of shame in Aboriginal autobiography. Shame, she argues, arises as a response to the proliferation and practical application of white colonial myths about Aboriginality. The texts, Dalziell shows, reveal the subject's interaction with these myths, their painful subjection to the premises contained within them, the acceptance and internalisation sometimes afforded them by Aboriginal people, as well as their courageous resistances against them.

The linguist, Jean Harkins has analysed semantic differences between the standard English word shame and *shame* in Australian Aboriginal English, particularly in the context of the school classroom (1990, 1986). She reports, both on the basis of children's own self-reporting and of teacher observation, that Aboriginal children commonly experience shame when called upon to answer questions or otherwise singled out in class, whether for praise or approbation. Harkins is at pains to show that while non-Aboriginal



teachers are inclined to view expressions of shame and shame behaviours as destructive states, reflecting negative self-image - possibly race based - and low self-esteem, which need to be overcome, *shame* viewed within Aboriginal cultural orientations may in fact be seen in terms of a developed sense of propriety dictating behaviour in unfamiliar environments.

Both authors illuminate aspects of Koori shame but neither an account based on the effects of racist myths nor one which seeks explanation in purely, and in this case, not well developed, classical concepts of shame are sufficient to an understanding of the decidedly complicated nature of shame in the cross-cultural and post-colonial context.

I will begin my discussion by briefly reviewing the anthropological literature on emotion and shame. In the first place it should be noted that the word shame is worked over a broader semantic territory in Koori English than it is in standard Australian English. In standard useage a family of shame-like or shame-related words are employed to distinguish differences in meaning and gradations in intensity ranging from shy, through embarrassed, humiliated and mortified and specific forms are used to indicate adjectives, verbs and nouns. Although such words are not absent from the local English lexicon, in everyday talk at Jerrinja, the use of shame to cover the full gammit of meaning is more common. Jerrinja speakers, unlike speakers of stronger forms of Aboriginal English, are inclined to make some indicatory modifications, however, the forms which result – including terms such as shamed, shameness, shameful, shame job - are often non-standard variations.

In 1978, Hiatt published an article on the classification of the emotions amongst Australian Aborigines. In this, he recorded, he was entering a 'virgin field' (1978:182). Hiatt predicted that all Aboriginal languages possess words for the emotions of anger, fear, sorrow, jealousy, and shame, although he goes on to record that, in at least one language, a single word was used to express both fear and shame.

Hiatt records that the Gidjingali translate the verb *-gurakadj* as 'to be afraid' or 'to be ashamed' (1978:185). Citing a range of instances in which he observed its use, Hiatt himself differentially translates the word as afraid/fear, embarrassed/embarrassment, ashamed/shame. An explicit assumption is made on Hiatt's part that shame and fear are distinct emotions - apparently with ready equivalence to Western concepts and contexts. Countenancing the possibility that both shame and fear are simultaneously implicated in *-gurakadj*, Hiatt argues that although such ambiguity is sometimes relevant it would be 'surprising' if shame were an element in other cases - reactions to killers, strangers, snakes or ghosts - or fear in the case of an encounter with a naked woman or in circumspection surrounding the mother-in-law (1978:185) (emphasis added). The use of a common term is explained, rather, by a characteristic reliance of Aboriginal languages on contextual interpretation over the proliferation of vocabulary to mark meaningful difference and, perhaps, Hiatt postulates in conclusion, from an impulse common in each circumstance to retreat from the offending stimuli (1978:186).

Since Hiatt wrote his essay, the assumption that local idioms of emotion are simply translatable terms passively reflecting a homogenous human experience has been radically challenged. Orthodox conceptions and analyses of emotion have been unsettled and a new subdiscipline of anthropology founded upon the claim that the 'passions' - and even the minds and bodies from which they are purported to arise - are not the natural products of a universal human biology and psychology but substantially culturally determined. 'Not only ideas', wrote Geertz, 'but emotions too, are cultural artifacts in man' (cited D'Andrade 1984:81).

A substantial body of work has now been dedicated to demonstrating the cultural specificity of emotion concepts; to showing 'how emotional meaning is fundamentally structured by particular cultural systems and particular social and material environments' (Lutz 1988:5). Embedded within local theories of emotion, self and morality, local idioms of emotion have been found critical in shaping markedly different understandings and experiences of emotion.

While some psychologists had been willing to concede scope for cultural difference in the instigating events and expression of emotion, in her article, *The Shame of the Headhunters and the Autonomy of Self*, Rosaldo enjoined that rather than viewing culture as an 'add on' to 'presumed physiological universals' (1983:136), social and cultural considerations should be seen as integral to the constitution of emotional states<sup>1</sup>.

Although she begins with what seems a lesser observation that 'knowledge about feeling is always, and necessarily, mediated by some cultural/linguistic framework' (Rosaldo 1983:135), her argument takes the influence of culture in emotion to deeper levels. The thesis is elaborated in the seminal 1984 essay, *Towards an anthropology of self and feeling*:

...recognition of the fact that thought is always culturally patterned and infused with feelings, which themselves reflect a culturally ordered past, suggests that just as thought does not exist in isolation from affective life, so affect is culturally ordered and does not exist apart from thought. . Instead of seeing culture as an 'arbitrary' source of 'contents' that are processed by our universal minds, it becomes necessary to ask how 'contents' may themselves affect the 'form' of mental process. (1984:137).

Differences in the way we 'think about the world' (Rosaldo 1984:142) saturate the meanings and experience of emotion such that, 'the Balinese no more feel 'guilt' than we feel *lek*, the Balinese emotion closest to our 'shame'. In exploring cultural variation in the symptomatology of depression, Kleinman and Good, and other contributors to the 1985 study, *Culture and Depression*, are led not only to question the universality of symptoms of depression as posited by Western psychiatry but to call in doubt the very validity of 'depression' as a cross-cultural category. The authors find radical variation in the meanings, expression and somatic experience of dysphoric emotion between societies, such that experiences of emotion in one society may be alien to another and translation between them perplexed. The argument proceeds in highly relativistic terms .

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<sup>1</sup> Although she suggests there may be variation in the relative balance between cultural and physiological factors amongst different emotions (1983:136).



'Describing how it feels to be grieved or melancholy in another society,' they write, 'leads straight away into analysis of different ways of being a person in radically different worlds.' (1985:3). Psychiatrists underestimate, they charge, 'the very alien psychological worlds of many of the societies studied by anthropologists' (1985:6).

Inspired in part by their discoveries of the strong social orientation of self and emotion in the ethnopsychologies of other peoples and following in a strong sociological tradition, some anthropologists have been especially concerned to take emotions beyond the domain of the inner person; to recognise that feelings are ultimately grounded in social relations (c.f. Gerber 1985, Brenneis 1990, Levy 1984). 'Many cultural idioms,' Brenneis observes, 'have been found to emphasise the social, to situate emotions in the relation between self and others and between persons and events' (1990:113).

Emotion has been found not only to be a *product* of social relations but a form of communication and a coinage in social action that may be deployed and transacted strategically to incite, legitimate, stymie or otherwise influence social action for group or individual ends (cf. Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). Further as Rosaldo and others contend, emotions must be considered in political perspective, 'Selves and feelings, shaped by culture may be understood in turn as the creation of particular sorts of polities' (Rosaldo 1984:142). Moreover, emotions, which play a 'fundamental and organising role...in behaviour, thought and meaning systems' (Lutz 1980 cited Levy 1984:216) are critically implicated in the production and reproduction of particular political and ideological structures.

While the focus on emotion as 'discursive practice' and as social product has been critical in highlighting the social and political effects and intents of emotion these arguments have, I would argue, sometimes travelled too far in unseating the emotion from the body. In its extreme, the radical cultural constructionist argument, seems to make the body over entirely to processes of socialisation. In the introduction to their 1990 volume, *Language and the politics of emotion*, Lutz and Abu-Lughod, eschew a focus on internal psychobiological states in favour of a view of emotion as socially constituted, socially

visible and socially effectual within particular ethnospecific contexts. In their approach, emotional discourse and discourses of emotion are the central objects of study, not as reflections of feeling, but as communicative and strategic acts with social and political implications and intents. The argument goes so far as to press a view of emotion as 'discursive practice' (10). The body is not entirely excluded from the analysis but the one reinserted here is but a dummy introduced without conviction. Lutz and Abu-Lughod 'recognise the *possibility* that emotions are also *framed* in most contexts as experiences that involve the whole person, including the body' (1990:12, emphasis added), however, they contend - contra the research of Ekman et.al which seeks to prove the existence of a natural base set of human emotions through the identification of universally occurring and pan-culturally recognisable facial expressions - that 'to learn how, when, where, and by whom emotions ought to be enacted is to learn a set of body techniques including facial expressions, postures, and gestures.' (1990:12). By replacing the sensate body with a bloodless puppet, it seems to me they lose sight of the visceral aspect that gives emotion its potency in attaching value to meaning and in motivating action.

There is some value, I believe, in the psychological and psychobiological literature which has documented that shame is accompanied by a certain repertoire of physical expressions (see Darwin 1872; Lewis 1971). Observable physiological behaviours typically associated with the emotion include the downcasting and averting of the gaze, covering of the face, lowering the head, the collapse and closure of body posture and blushing, bearings which Laing has collectively described as the 'implosion of the self' (cited Lewis 1971:37). These gestures would appear to have universal currency (cf. Epstein 1984) and have been described in the classical Aboriginal context (c.f. Meggitt 1962, Liberman 1985). Thomson (1935: 488) notes that amongst the *Tjugundji*, of Cape York the expression "I forehead bow" means to be ashamed.

Phenomenologists argue that 'in everyday life our experience is characterized by the *disappearance* of our body from awareness' (Csordas 1994:8). The body is brought unpleasantly back into consciousness in times of breakdown, of distress or dysfunction. This sense of heightened bodily awareness is, as previously noted, characteristic of the

experience of shame. When the mind is fixed on consciousness of the body, the flow of movement, the instrumental use of the body becomes incapacitated, hence the immobilisation engendered by stage fright. Subjective feelings which have been associated with the shame state include a sense of paralysis (Retzinger 1996:13) - of being rooted to the spot (Gilbert 1998:6) - of helplessness, passivity and loss of control. Lewis (1986) has described feelings of paniclike anxiety accompanied by the evaporation of the capacity for rational thinking producing the sensation that the mind has gone blank (Gilbert 1998:6).

The prominence of attention to the self, noted in the physiological descriptions of shame, is congruent with the self-focused theories of shame propounded by psychoanalysts and psychologists. According to these arguments, the uncomfortable, sometimes mortifying, awareness of self produced by the experience of shame is brought about by the perception that one has become the object of critical scrutiny and negative evaluation by the 'other'. The experience of shame is associated with a vicarious awareness of the 'other's' view of the self (Lewis 1971:198); it being felt that 'a source in the field ...scorn(s), despise(s) or ridicule(s) the self' (Lewis 1971:39). The experience is seen to occasion an acute awareness of the self and also to bring focus upon the rejecting 'other' (Lewis 1971:25). According to the psychoanalysts, the emotion may evoke hostile feelings of shame-range or humiliated fury toward the other but usually the feelings are redirected back accusatorily at the self (Lewis 1971:198).

Within this view, shame is considered to be primarily engendered by the words or actions or observing presence of another or others, but it may also arise in the context of privately entertained memories, imaginings and self-reflections. In the latter cases, analysts argue, exposure and judgements of deficiency occur before an internalised 'other' or ego ideal (c.f. Lewis 1971, Lynd 1958).

Retzinger and others (c.f. Scheff 1988), taking social connection as the fundamental human motivation, posit 'threat or damage to social bonds' as the primary source of shame (Retzinger 1996:8). Retzinger postulates that emotions, particularly shame and

embarrassment, regulate the social distance between self and other (ibid). Shame signals a warning when there is too much distance - which might lead to feelings of alienation or rejection, or too little distance - which constitutes an invasion of privacy or perhaps signals a lack of respect. While so far as these theorists are concerned shame is primarily a response to the alienation of the self *from* the Other, Sartre (1989) sees it predominantly as an alienation of the self from the self and from the freedom of its own possibilities *by* the Other.

For Sartre, the source of shame is the look of the Other which transforms the subjective being into an object, and transfixes him spatially and temporally in a world not of his own making. The self becomes alienated from itself, 'an unknown object of unknowable appraisals' (1989: 267), and yet in this being-for-others it must recognize itself and upon itself bring its own judgment to pass, 'I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other' (1989:222). Yet for Sartre, shame arises not so much from the revelation and condemnation of specific faults or flaws as from the process of objectification itself which degrades and enslaves, 'my being is dependent at the center of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being' (1989:267). The Other is experienced as a transcendent and omnipotent consciousness that not only defines and alienates the self and limits its possibilities but which arrogates all the world to itself:

Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place; everything still exists for me; but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object. The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting (1989: 255).

Here the disconcerting effects of objectification of the self are powerfully evoked, yet from an anthropological perspective the notion of self propounded, in which the free, unfettered independence of the individual is idealised, can be seen to be one of highly culturally specific and ideological value. Geertz writes:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organised into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures (Geertz 1984:126).

Ruth Benedict's classic, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, was an early attempt to draw connections between the emotions, self-orientations and the social and psychological organisation of particular societies. Rosaldo developed her insights into the anthropology of emotion in her study on Ilongot shame. In that paper she suggests that shame and guilt may universally be concerned with 'the threat of circumstance or activity to undermine an ideal presentation of the self.' (1983:136). But if, as she argues, they - like all emotions - are 'moral acts' involving judgements about self and situation, local differences in understandings of self, interpretations of situation and ontologies of emotion, will have critical implications for 'the ways such feelings work' (1983:136).

It is not possible to consider here the many examples within the anthropological literature in which the cultural specificity of shame is linked to broader webs cultural difference in local systems of meaning, value and selfhood. An extensive Mediterranean literature, for example (eg. Gilmore 1987), identifies the strongly gendered sense of self underlying relevant notions of shame and pride while arguments endure over the notions of self and status which underlie Balinese *lek* and Javanese *isin* (Keeler 1983). Shame would appear to have as many variations as there are cultures but there are significant distinctions to be drawn between the relative visibility and value accorded shame in sociocentrically oriented traditional societies and its relative repression and maligned status in individualistically oriented modern ones.

A review of the Australian anthropological literature on shame in classical Aboriginal society (see Appendix 1), shows that shame is, to use Levy's expression, an emotion

which is hypercognised in Aboriginal society. It is highly visible, heavily institutionalised, socially valorised and consequently an emotion to which individuals are strongly sensitised. This may be linked to the strong relational orientation in Aboriginal constructions of self (Myers 1986). Shaming is employed as a technique of childhood socialisation and public social sanction, however, as I will argue, it is not effected only by external negative pressure but works also through 'shame-discretion' (Schneider cited Epstein 1984:33) as an internal regulatory device to ensure morally acceptable behaviour and positive presentation of the self (Myers 1986:121, 126). Shame is implicated in the definition and the conduct of social relationships both at a conscious level and as a socially informed bodily disposition. Relatedly, shame is also institutionalised as a prototypical and decorous behaviour for the expression of deference and respect. The emphasis on shame within Aboriginal society will be shown to be a corollary of the elevation within Aboriginal society of the values of relatedness and autonomy as identified by Myers.

In concluding this review, I am drawn to the work of Scheper-Hughes and Lock, whose conceptualisation of emotion as the 'mediatrix' among the individual body, the social body, and the body politic, provides a powerful formulation of its significance and critical effects. It is this sense of emotion's complex dialectical entanglement in the existential experience of the lived body, the moral constitution of self and sociality and the structures of power, which I wish to retain in the following discussion of shame.

### **Under the gaze of the other**

The sense of being under unceasing scrutiny lends a distinct edge and an acute discomfort to the outlook of many Jerrinja residents. Comments are frequently made on the unwanted stares trained on Koories in public places, while even activity on the mission is felt to be the subject of prying eyes; mansions poised on the hill above give an impression of constant oversight and residents comment that pedestrians and motorists are always 'sticky beaking' - 'I see them looking may be three, six times a day'. Most would prefer to minimise their exposure; the short distance between mission and shop, is

traversed by vehicle, if at all possible, some spectators at the football spend the entire day in the confines of the car, forays to town are almost always conducted in the anonymity of a group, where one will not be caught 'one out' and resort is often made to the most effective measure of all, staying firmly put on the mission.

In the public space beyond the mission, where cultural meanings, values and modes of interaction are defined in white terms, Koories<sup>2</sup> also feel themselves highly visible and vulnerable.

Shame's like its embarrassing. Like its when you walk in and everyone looks at you. You think "oh shame"...

When you have to go out in a different environment, that's when the shameness comes in.

I used to get shame when I went to the pub. I'd think people were watching you all the time. Think there was something wrong with you.

Shame manifests itself in the bodily demeanour of a woman in the supermarket who - gaze downcast, shoulders hunched - waits uncomfortably at the checkout hoping not to be drawn into conversation; in the compulsive efforts of another, visiting a relative in hospital, to tuck in her daughter's shirt; in the teacher's report that describes the Koori student as passive or the one that describes the uncontrollable child who swears abuse at her incessantly; in the lengths to which a person will go to avoid being the one who has to go to the bar for drinks; in the hostile reaction to an apparently disinterested glance - 'Haven't they ever seen a blackfella before?'

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter aims to bring to light an emotional experience which I believe is significant for a broad section of the Jerrinja population. There is undoubtedly substantial variation in the extent and degrees to which people experience the feeling, with a significant gender bias at play. The emotion would seem to be more prevalent and more profoundly felt by women. Further research would be required to do justice to the topic. As perhaps is inevitably the case in anthropology one does not arrive at the questions until the journey is nearing its end.

Feeling the power of their dominant position, whites have no compunction and minimal risk in turning their gaze on the disempowered. The black person is an object of insatiable curiosity for the white, because, they occupy a particular space in the white imagination, that of 'Other' to the white self. This is a situation common across the imperial domains, where colonised peoples have come to serve as 'illegitimate and refractory foil to Europe' (Parry 1995). The gaze is drawn to Aboriginal people too, by their visible or perceived subjugation and impoverishment (material and non-material), which whites feel the urge to know in all its depths, in spite of, and because of, a deep-seated recognition of their complicity in its production.

If Aboriginal people are sometimes, unduly under the impression that they are being looked at, we can find some insight in Sartre's writings. It is true, he says, that I may be mistaken in apprehending certain appearances of the world as manifestations that a look is presently turned upon me - the unoccupied window, the artificial eye, the misleading creak of the stairs, the footsteps of one whose look is actually fixed elsewhere (1989: 275-277) - but 'the convergence of the Other's eyes in my direction', or the appearance thereof, both serve as the 'pure occasion' of my realization of *being-looked-at*, of the constant reality of my being as a being-for-others:

The proof of my condition as man, as an object for *all* other living men, as thrown in the arena beneath millions of looks and escaping myself millions of times - this proof I realize concretely on the occasion of the upsurge of an object into my universe if this object indicates to me that I am probably an object at present functioning as a *differentiated this* for a consciousness. (Sartre 1989:\*\*\*\*)

The historical experience of Aborigines leaves them in no doubt of the constant reality of their being beings-for-others, a *this* for other consciousnesses.

That people at Jerrinja should feel themselves to be under constant observation is hardly surprising given that, as previously documented, surveillance by whites was an intrinsic and unpleasant part of everyday Aboriginal life on the mission for six decades. The gaze



turned upon Koories by the manager and matron - invasive of their privacy, critical, condescending, signalling disgust and rejection, threatening and sometimes dangerous - brought them into uncomfortable self-conscious awareness. It was a look meant to inspire shame and no doubt frequently did. No wonder that Aboriginal people sought refuge in 'free spaces'.

Since no other white people were allowed on the mission, and because trips into town were few, given its remoteness, a general lack of funds and a wariness about attitudes there, many people, especially women and children had limited experience of whites beyond the prying and critical eyes of the administration. Children especially came to associate profoundly disconcerting and frightening feelings with white scrutiny and with whites themselves. An older man at Jerrinja recalls:

I can remember seeing the managers coming around the houses, I don't know, I used to get scared somehow, I don't know why. Like he wasn't looking for me or anything, but I was thinking to myself, wonder what's the whitefella man doing walking around. I can just vaguely remember that, like what was he doing there. I was about ten, about eight, about ten. I was just trying to pick it up then. I used to ask mum about it. She never used to say to me anything, she said, oh you wouldn't know son, you're too young to know. You know.

Such anxiety no doubt was underlain in part by the fear his parents might have held about the possibility of their removal. Certainly some Aboriginal people's experience, including at least one man who lived on the mission, was of their constantly having to hide and move about to keep them from the clutches of the authorities.

The relentless process of mutual social monitoring in which all people daily engage (Goffman 1997), is rendered almost invisible in the ordinary interaction of daily life where individuals operate on a field of shared expectations:

This system occurs both between and within interactants. Ordinarily it functions so efficiently and invisibly that it guarantees the alignment of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals. Mutual conformity and respect lead to pride and fellow feeling, which lead to further conformity, which leads to further positive feeling, in a system that seems virtually automatic (Scheff 1988:397).

Koories are not in the habit of receiving constant reaffirmation for their existence in the mainstream. They do not serve as frictionless mirrors which reflect congenial images of white life, and in countless ways find themselves subject to the coldness and contempt which Cooley observes comes only rarely and with sudden shock to those who ordinarily fit the bill:

As is the case with other feelings, we do not think much of it (that is, of social self-feeling) so long as it is moderately and regularly gratified. Many people of balanced mind and congenial activity scarcely know that they care what others think of them, and will deny, perhaps with indignation, that such care is an important factor in what they are to do. But this is illusion. If failure or disgrace arrives, if one suddenly finds that the faces of men show coldness or contempt instead of the kindness and deference that he is used to, he will perceive from the shock, the fear, the sense of being outcast and helpless, that he was living in the minds of others without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears us up (Cooley 1922:208 cited Scheff 1988:398).

### **Shame in the cross-cultural encounter**

The weightiness of Koori encounters in the white domain is more easily understood in light of Bourdieu's analysis of social interaction. For Bourdieu (1977) a social encounter is not an isolated communicative event. The interaction is firstly defined by the objective structure of the relations between the participants. Actors bring to each interaction dispositions which mark their social position in relation to the other and which are manifestations of the history of that structural position.

The white space of mainstream public life operates on a cultural logic which remains by and large invisible to members of the dominant majority. To those who share its premises, the 'everyday world', occupied by the 'average' Australian, its mundane to and fro, flow along with natural ease. At a fundamental level, it is neither for you or against you it just is. One need only grease the wheels with a little commonsense and common decency for smooth running. For members of the Aboriginal minority, however, all interaction in the mainstream is heavily laden with ethnic or racial overtones. Koories are forever cognisant of, and challenged by, the cultural specificity of the mainstream which casts them in its shadow as deficient or deviant.

Manifold and minute judgements are constantly being made as Goffman has argued,

Since the sources of impressions used by the observing individual involve a multitude of standards pertaining to politeness and decorum, pertaining both to social intercourse and task-performance, we can appreciate afresh how daily life is enmeshed in moral lines of discrimination. (Goffman 1997: 22).

On the most general level, Koories bring to the interface signs of what may loosely be referred to as their class position, differentials in education, income and social status revealed in styles of communication and presentation. The social standing of Koories, however, differs fundamentally from those other sections of the populace of lower economic standing. Koories are distinguished by a habitus which is product of an original and profound socio-cultural difference and of a very particular and particularly malign history. Moreover, as Fanon would aver, Koories are the possessors of that unescapable and overdetermining marker of structural inequality in colonial society, a black skin.

In the cross-cultural encounter, shame arises, in part, from a perception that one lacks the social skills required for successful interaction. In the mainstream, the kin networks which orient Koori social interaction are absent or inoperative. People say they don't

know the right way to talk to whitefellas. They are aware of, but not *au fait* with, the social manners and small talk employed by Europeans and they perceive their own communication styles, characterised for example by swearing, as deviant within the mainstream:

Well most gubbahs like - they're like - they don't like to be approached in a rude manner. Like we're straight out, like we say - like we swear or whatever. Like they're real courteous and polite.

Some Koories find themselves intimidated in mainstream interaction by the English language. Although the features that distinguish their own internal speech forms and style as Aboriginal English are quite subtle, there is nevertheless a perception amongst many that they do not speak 'the white man's English' as well as others do. 'Big words' met in everyday interactions which are not understood produce confusion and embarrassment; a situation compounded where authority is being asserted over them or where the specialised vocabularies of the medical and legal professions are employed.<sup>3</sup> Some experience difficulties trying to express themselves and feel self-conscious about the way they speak and about what they have to say. People 'try to speak highly' but 'get mixed up'. Clearly such difficulties arise from educational disadvantage as well as from cultural differences as Geraldine's reiterated qualifications - 'I'm not a very educated person' - recognise. Those whose literacy levels are low are especially prone to eschew mainstream interaction. They 'get frightened' or 'say shame' because they cannot read and write.

One man described his attempts to integrate himself in the mainstream. He had left the mission and fallen in love with a white woman. He got a job and a haircut to try to satisfy her parents, which didn't work, and married her anyway in the face of opposition. For ten years he worked on the road works, took out a mortgage and did all the things he thought he should. At work he found himself subject to racist comments and was always passed over for promotions. Things didn't work out in the end and he decided to throw it all in

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<sup>3</sup> In this, of course, they are not alone.

and come 'back to earth'. He calls it his ten year holiday at the whiteman's expense. 'If they'd given me a promotion,' he said 'I'd still be there.'

Overt prejudice about his being black may well have contributed to the failure of his employer to give him a promotion but both that prejudice and the unwillingness to give him recognition probably arose from his unfamiliarity with the appropriate modes of interaction and his lack of cultural capital, small things about his demeanour, his attitude.

Racism has its overt expressions. The slurs and insults, those particular public bars which make it known Koories are not welcome, the violent assaults on young people at the local show, the woman who calls the police when she sees Jerrinja children in the driveway of their white friend's home, the police who call Aboriginal children black bastards and say they wonder Koories celebrate 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays when they don't know the ages of their kids.

Messages of inferiority and undesirability were expressed not only in words but in practical interaction with whites, where social distance was signified and reinforced spatially and temporally. In the first place, of course, their confinement and isolation on the reserves spelled the message that Koories were pariahs, unwanted and contaminating, better kept out of sight and mind. They, like animals could be penned up, domesticated and quarantined, 'They had the idea of putting (us) on a farm like sheeps and cattles'.

Their dehumanisation was reinforced at picking time, when farmers herded labourers and their families from the reserve into the backs of their trucks to be driven south for the harvest, people again making the comparison of their treatment like animals. Such messages were not lightly read, in another context a Queensland Murri expressed to me, his profound sense of humiliation and anger when he and a cousin were forced to ride on a truck tray while the farmer's kelpie occupied the front seat. Even a dog held greater social standing.

Koori interactions in the local area and in the town of Nowra were marked by attention to and discrimination over colour. Geraldine remembers:

And this used to happen when we started the school in Nowra. We'd get on the bus and then the bus driver'd separate us. Separate us on the bus Nat. 'You Koori people, Aboriginal people, up the front, whites up the back.' I said why were they doing this to us, you know, separating us. We're all the same, only different is the colour of us. And we had to do this right through primary school and then things started to change. And then I think these white people thought, like if we had a disease or something too. And it made us feel very bad about ourselves. Like in front of white people.

For Jerrinja children and teenagers, the school experience is heavily racialised:

Like at school right, we all get called racist names...they say heaps of things to us blackfellas mate...We took it to the teachers and we got in trouble for it. So one day we all run away, all us Koori kids and we all got sent back to the thingo and some of us got caned and sent home. We all scattered.

We all had a big brawl with the other kids... 'cause they called one of (us) a fat black cunt or something like that and so we all - 'cause they're were heaps of us - and we all got the upper hand

While some students respond to their difficulties at school by playing up and swearing at teachers, to be 'shamed' is a common response.

Some like Cory swear at people but other people are so embarrassed they won't talk at all. But mine (reaction) was like, I was quiet. I was shamed. I was a quiet kid. I was ...all through high school I didn't mix in with any of them, I just sat there by myself and I still have trouble with it now, 'bout having to mix in with people. Like going up and talking to people.

There are myriad other institutional forms, subtle and not-so-subtle expressions which are exercised constantly and often unconsciously. When a Koori is taken ill in hospital, large numbers of kin visit, often together. Their presence aggravates white staff, patients and others, who make it felt that this is not acceptable behaviour. At the funeral of a Jerrinja woman, the Catholic priest addressed a huge congregation of her clearly Aboriginal kin. In typical style the mourners sang the country western hymn the Old Rugged Cross and the coffin was draped in the Aboriginal flag, yet the priest, who did mention her long term residency in the area, made not a single gesture to acknowledge her Aboriginality. More flagrantly examples - the difficulty with which Koories are faced in getting rental accommodation, flagging a taxi and the negative media saturation.

### **Cleanliness**

Like the claims made by Sartre about the Jews, Koories, it seems may be seen to have been 'poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, ...liv(ing) in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype...' (Sartre 1989[1943]) That a woman should, in extolling the best qualities of her deceased mother, give emphatic attention to her virtues as a cleanly person and scrupulous housekeeper, gives an insight both onto the struggle fought by the mother to prove herself in life and to the continuing need of the daughter to grapple with the stereotypes understood to define their Aboriginality. The play of such stereotypes affects the image of past and present. When a teenager recounted the time he had been out on a heritage oriented camping trip with a group from Jerrinja, I had asked whether he got a feeling for how life would have been for Koories in the past, 'Mmm, we did. Without washing. Like we didn't care about washing and how we looked and we were all shabby and we didn't have tents either...'

Cleanliness, or their lack thereof, is an issue that has been constantly pressed upon Koories. From the earliest days Aboriginal people were spurned as dirty, odorous and pestulant. The confinement of Aborigines on reserves was in part given reason by the public perception that Aborigines were unclean and unsanitary and that their unrestrained

presence posed a public health risk. It has already been noted that the administrations of the reserves were obsessed with their efforts to induce habits of cleanliness and subjected Aboriginal people to humiliating inspections and reprimands, invading their privacy and insulting their capacities.

As government policy moved toward assimilation and the dispersal of Aborigines in mainstream residential areas, negative images of unsanitary living conditions, unsavoury personal hygiene and presentation were increasingly promulgated in public discourse and in the media. Considerable public hysteria developed over the pathogenicity of the Koori and the threat to public welfare. A council health inspector wrote in 1965 that the resettlement of Aboriginal fringedwellers in downtown Nowra 'could lead to a dispersal of insanitary conditions throughout the town instead of the present concentration' (cited Phelps 1989:34), although he acknowledged that such resettlement would assist the cause of assimilation. Aboriginal children attending public schools were (and continue to be) singled out and ridiculed as the dirty purveyors of lice, scabies and other unhealthy infections. Racist slurs are commonly loaded with reference to dirt - dirty boong, black skunk, scaborigine. Koories were (and again continue to be in certain cases) excluded from certain hotel bars, confined to non-white stalls in the cinema, and otherwise ostracised, ostensibly on the grounds that they were unclean.

Of course proximity of Aborigines was not always undesirable, particular in situations where their labour was an asset. Demarcations could be drawn at finer levels, so that for instance, Jerrinja residents recall that as farm labourers on Comerong they were fed from cans, while whites enjoyed homecooked meals. In her autobiography, *Wandering Girl*, Aboriginal woman Glenyse Ward recounts that during her employment as a domestic servant, she was always required after travelling in the car, to disinfect the seat she had been sitting on (cited Dalziel 1999:135). As whites recoiled from contact, Koories were made to experience their own bodies as a source of shame. The insults weighed heavily on Aboriginal consciousness.



At Jerrinja many of the women are fastidious housekeepers. An incident which took place during my fieldstay, brought to my attention the way in which Koories continue to understand themselves as condemned in white eyes as unclean. A guest in Delia's home, I was taken totally unawares one day when, after my morning shower, she made this bitter charge: 'People who shower everyday, the dirt's in their mind.' My own daily bathing routine was clearly felt as a comment and critique directed against her personally and against Koories generally. I had in fact no sense whatever of my host's bathing habits and if I thought anything about it at all, probably admired her housekeeping skills as far superior to my own, but I was also oblivious to the fact that my very presence in the house induced an anxiety that intimate habits were being subject to minute scrutiny and necessarily found wanting.

A conversation one day with Butch, a man who had grown up on the mission but now resides in town had a similar slant. Living on the mission for a year, he commented, I would have seen lots of things, but I wouldn't write the truth, he said, I'd end up writing lies. I wouldn't want to hurt people. I must admit that I remain now, as I was then, more than a little uncertain of just what it was that he assumed I saw and would want to cover up - there was no doubt more than one issue at stake - but that dirt was amongst them was indicated by the direction that our conversation subsequently took. Butch, who works as a builder, confided that he ignores the bad housekeeping and uncleanliness he finds in many of the Koori households he works in. His attitude, it was clear, was underlain not by blasé inattention but hyperawareness. 'I always try', he said, 'to hide it from my (white) workmates.'

A person sees themselves condemned not only by one's own actions but by the behaviour of others. When the local television station broadcast a story about Council clearing out fourteen truckloads of rubbish from the Koori haunt on the Crookhaven foreshore, Sylvia was upset, 'They (the young Koori drinkers) got no right going down there and making a mess.' Whatever efforts one made oneself it appears one will always be let down by the side. In the case of Aborigines, dirt seems incorrigible. The problem being, of course, that something more than dirt and grime and broken glass is at stake.

Shame, so the psychologists argue, can involve relatively permeable self-boundaries so that a person may feel shamed by the behaviour of others (Lewis 1971:32). Hence, Sharda expressed her shame at seeing a Koori drunk in the street, 'When I see drunks...When I see them drunk, laying around the streets. God that shame job. Makes me shamed to be black.'

According to Bourdieu, until 'a system of mechanisms has been constituted capable of objectively ensuring the reproduction of the established order by its own motion', the dominant class must 'work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination which are even then never entirely trustworthy'. Once that dominance is institutionalised, however, 'the dominant class have only to let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination' (Bourdieu 1977:190). In inculcating an autonomic mechanism of Koori exclusion from mainstream life, Koori shame might in this sense be seen as the ultimate achievement of the dominant social order, for it has thereby saved itself the daily and dirty work of overtly repressive measures. This is a potent for understanding the place of shame in domination of the indigenous minority, however, Koori shame is not signal of the totalisation of the dominant order. In excluding Aborigines from mainstream life, Koori shame serves more than one master.

### **Swearing**

The difficulties Koories experience in communicating with whitefellas are compounded because they can not assume the easy familiarity which makes talking with kin a simple matter. To my frustration, while I was at Jerrinja, I often found that my presence at a card game or other gathering led to restraint in speaking styles. Despite my repeated pleas that I thought nothing of it, people would refrain from swearing, chastise others for it or double take and apologise for their error. Several writers have noted the integral place of swearing in Aboriginal speech styles (Langton 1988, Carter 1984); a feature of their language which is consciously acknowledged by Koories themselves. At Jerrinja cursing, creative obscenities and lewd humour ride buoyantly in the flow of everyday

conversation between familiars as well as spiking outbursts of anger amongst them. As a general rule, however, Koories see swearing as inappropriate and unacceptable in the presence of whites (with the exception of close familiars) and in non-Aboriginal forums.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the ubiquitous, though less colourful, presence of swearing in mainstream public life and the media, the mainstream are perceived to be sensitive. Swearing behaviour is seen to confirm negative stereotypes of Koories, signalling vulgarity and uncouthness. One Koori woman, who was not averse to letting the language fly at home, returned from a session at the movies with her children saying she felt very shamed. There was so much swearing in the film, she said, people would be wondering what sort of mother she was bringing her children to see it.

It should hardly be surprising, furthermore, if Koories are cautious about swearing in public when, over many years, there have been repeated instances of charges, fines and even incarceration over language offences. The same reason has constituted grounds for periodic barring of individuals from local clubs and hotels, while swearing is a constant source of trouble and punishment for children at school.

Nevertheless, I would argue, the circumspection that surrounds swearing in front of whites, has traditional elements of restraint which are signal of the marking of different communication styles. At a football match, a woman reacted urgently to a drunken Koori woman swearing loud abuse at her partner, 'Tell her! Talking where Gubbahs are!' Swearing with strangers or non-familiars is not considered an appropriate or respectful behaviour.

Conversely, the efforts by some whites to ingratiate themselves with Koories by adopting the characteristic swearing language style is not appreciated. Read as an illegitimate claim to identity with Koories and over-presumptuous familiarity, it provokes an agitated response. Swearing is the language proper to one's intimate familiars.

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<sup>4</sup> The case may be different for Koori men working in mainstream contexts where swearing among men is a favoured speech style.

This is not to say that Koories never swear at whitefellas. Swearing may, as Langton (1988) has documented, be enacted as a pointed and conscious exercise of transgression and disrespect, aimed to shock and offend. Sport matches where Koori teams play against whites are a forum where swearing is given greater reign – the referee and opposition players being targetted for round and racially based abuse.

I contend that a consciousness of traditionally generated restrictions on behaviour also surrounds eating as suggested by the following episode. After the formalities at a children's sporting award presentation, parents and children remained to chat and take part in refreshments. The food was not perhaps particularly appetising, yet it was ample...As soon as we left, however, Graham complained that he was hungry. 'Why didn't you eat something there?' I asked. His wife snapped, 'you're too wild for that. You're not too wild when you go to the club.' The implication being, as I see it, that this shy behaviour was typical of the old blackfellas.

Sharing food together is a sign of relationship and familiarity. Hence in the Koori view that a willingness to sit down and eat with them serves as a sign of social acceptance. Withdrawals of such familiarity may also be employed pointedly to renounce relationship as an expression of dissatisfaction or anger. So Dallas declaimed, one day, to the household in which I was living, 'I'm not eating Natalie's food 'cause I'm in the horrors with her'.

### **Socialisation of shame**

In accounting for high levels of sensitivity to shame amongst Jerrinja people I ought to be able to present strong evidence of the use of shaming as a general tool of childhood socialisation. On this front, however, my data is notably thin. I have isolated minor examples, the small child teased by a teenager for his snotty nose, the one jovially labelled a real 'twenty oner' for acting older than her age, the remark in the midst of

disciplining a child that 'this kid does stupid things' - but can describe no remarkable instances nor any generalised pattern. In the first place I am inclined to explain my failures of observation in terms of lack of attention; it was not until my main fieldwork period lapsed that my sights were set on shame. Nevertheless, as a resident of households whose membership always or frequently included children and given the ubiquitous presence of children in the flow of daily community life one would have thought that the use of shaming as a technique of control might have made a stronger impression.

Based on other accounts of childhood shaming I might also have been expected to be drawn into shaming dramas as the 'watching stranger'; I recall no such incident. I do remember disliking one person intensely because I thought they were a cruel tease, pursuing their teasing relentlessly to the point of bringing the target to tears. I did not, however, come to see this as a characteristic Koori behaviour. Upon reflection, as I recall the typical means employed by adults for correcting and controlling children were gentle encouragements, moralised lessons, loudly voiced directives and admonishments and threats of physical punishment, usually accompanied by colourful profanities. I can not say whether my presence had any effect on behaviour, nor whether I was simply not privy to the arenas where it took place. It should be noted, for example, that from a very young age children spent a good deal of their time roaming in small unsupervised possies. An examination of the dynamics of these peer groups would be revealing.

Nevertheless a shame consciousness surrounding interaction with whitefellas is actively inculcated in children both as a matter of direct instruction and sensitisation resultant upon the demonstrated discomfort experienced by significant adults and peers. The presence of non-Aboriginal people in a scene is inevitably brought to attention - 'Look at the gubbahs', 'There's gubbahs there'. Children observe that the presence of whitefellas calls for self-consciousness, censorship, modification of behaviour and formality. The relaxed ease of a group of women and children fishing off a pier is disturbed by the arrival of a white family. 'Fuck off', the adults whisper under their breaths and mimic the conversation of the newcomers. 'Gubbahs always have to stuff it up.' The disruption to

their fishing is significant but, moreover, the presence of whites interrupts the sense of unencumbered ease in an environment occupied only by Koories. Attention is drawn to the young child who unselfconsciously engages in conversation with whites, 'Look at her talking to whitefellas, she's got no shame'.

A negative consciousness and constraining of behaviours and associations bringing attention to themselves and their Aboriginality in the mainstream domain is exercised:

Well mainly me for instance, when I'm in town shopping and you know where, you know at the car park... well that's where they all get and drink and then we'd be standing over here near the phone box and then if Mina (Kylie's daughter)'s with me and she's got a friend or someone sitting over there she'll go 'Come on mum, I'm going over here' and I'll say, 'Don't go over there, that's shame job, get away from them.' I'm always like that if I'm in town, even with mum when she talks too loud, or we're arguing I'll say, 'Shut up, you're shaming me, don't shame me out'. Things like that. It could be the littlest thing.

The frequent public, vocal expressions of 'shame' and 'shame job' as a response to actual or imagined encounters in the mainstream are not only reflections of a felt emotion and signal of a cultural acceptance of shame as a natural response to the circumstance but a means by which shame is engendered and enforced as the appropriate reaction and by which interaction with the mainstream is constrained. Shame electrifies the boundary. Moreover, the common experience and common expression of emotion itself comes to constitute a ground of shared identity, creating an environment of pressure for conformity which is difficult to resist.

The possibility of generational change in general child rearing techniques and in the implication of shame in the definition of relations with whitefellas is worth considering. A number of women themselves highly vulnerable to feelings of shame in the cross-cultural context noted that their own children did not experience shame to the same degree:

They're totally different. Like Melinda, she'll speak her mind. She won't hang back like hold back on any words. Or you know, if someone was talking to her or spoke smart to her she'd give them the same thing back. Where Shannon's the same. I'm just opposite. ...I think they must get that from their father not me... All the kids I reckon are confident now.

Although I would argue that these women continue to enforce shame in their socialisation of children they have a conscious conviction that it is something that they and their children need to overcome. We've gotta try, says Geraldine, to make them get over this. 'You hear a lot...I say a lot now...don't be stupid, don't be shy. You know, try to make them get over this, they've gotta get over this. And our kids do, the little one's now, they got that in them. I don't know if it's a thing that goes through the generation or what it is, but you gotta encourage these kids and tell 'em there's nothing to be ashamed of.' Arguably the Western attitude toward shame is coming into play. The use of English carries over its semantic load and the Western shame associated with being shamed.

## **Conclusion**

In summary of my argument, my first contention is that Koories continue to uphold a strongly traditional orientation toward shame, closely linked to traditional standards of decorum and relational notions of self and the kin-based social order. This orientation predisposes them to be highly vulnerable to shame in the cross-cultural context. In the (post)colonial context shame is both historical and synchronous product, and agent, of the structural and ideological positioning of Koories as a subject minority within a dominant moral and political order. In the contemporary context, I argue, shame continues to serve a role both directly and indirectly in reproducing/protecting and sustaining a separate Koori moral community and group identity, however, the interplay of the meanings of shame in the cross-cultural context are productive of group and personal identities which are to varying degrees contaminated by stigma and internalised racism. The embodied nature of shame which makes it so highly effective in imbuing value to meaning and in

compelling social action or inaction is productive of painful and often debilitating levels of stress and distress for many Koori individuals potentially contributing to the re/production of social and economic marginalisation.

The individual body should be seen as the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity and struggle. (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:31).

The remarkable - but not surprising - thing to be observed is that the elements of shame that present themselves in relations between black and white today figured very early in the relations between black and white. In the space of Berry's 1838 essay, 'Recollections of the Aborigines', the matter of shame comes to attention four times and in four representative ways. Berry (1838) reflects:

There is certainly a considerable change in their ideas since I first knew them. The men and women used to walk about stark naked without any sense of shame. Now they all contrive to have some covering, and I think the females would have as much shame in appearing in a state of nudity as any white woman.

The imagery evoked - of innocence, the fall from grace and banishment from the garden of Eden - can not but have evoked or reflected some deep recognition of the negative effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Here, however, I wish to focus on the particular biblical allusion to original shame, the representation of the loss of unselfconsciousness through the acquisition of new knowledge (eating from the tree of knowledge). For Aboriginal people the arrival of whites produced a new consciousness, a new perspective on their own cultural values and practices so that ordinary things and lifeways became objects of conscious apprehension and sometimes, under the influence of white appraisal and admonishment, negatively valued.



The second sense of shame which comes to light I recounted in chapter 3 on first settlement. It is the incident where Broughton is ridiculed by a female relation for taking the part of Berry's servant. Here shame is a weapon of Aboriginal agency, deployed to maintain Aboriginal values, critique white society and to bring one of their own back to the fold.

The third instance of shame relates to Berry's discomfort at Aboriginal personal violence and his efforts to have people desist from it. Berry found Wajin, one of the local elders who he had bequeathed a brass plate upon, seated beside his wife, whose face and head were deeply cut and covered in blood:

'What is this Wajin who has dared to touch the sacred face of the Queen?' He replied, 'I did it'. 'Shame Wajin. Why did you do it?' 'Oh,' he says, 'it is nothing. I only given her a slight correction, a few gentle taps upon the head with a Waddy. She was very silly and made a great noise with her tongue. She would not erase from scalding until I broke her head. But I was merciful in the correction I gave her.' (Berry reproduced Organ 239)

I take this as an instance of the overt use of shaming in the condemnation and correction of Aboriginal practices. Such efforts remained ineffective because Aboriginal people retained their own perspective. Notably and in contrast to the attitudes which would emerge later in the relations between black and white, Berry noted limitations in his rights to intervene. On another occasion he reprimanded Broughton for the same misdemeanour. 'Broughton looked displeased at my meddling in his family affairs and I did not interfere further.'

A final instance, tied to notions of shame by the sense of sin evoked, involves Berry's recollections of a conversation with an Aboriginal man during a time of drought. Many of the Aboriginal people at the time were afflicted with influenza and the man had noted that they would not get well until it rained. Berry recounts, 'I told him that the Deity - pointing upwards - was so offended with the natives on account of their allowing the

white men to cohabit with their women' but the man, turned the critique back on the whites, 'it is too bad of the Blacks, but that the white men were equally bad.'

The issues arising from Berry's account - self-conscious objectification of culture under contact, the protection of Aboriginal relatedness, the use of shaming to compel conformity, its limitations when independent cultural autonomy is retained and the turning back of shame upon the white man - are those I hope to have shown all remain pertinent in understanding the crucial place of shame in the relations between Aboriginal people and white people today.

## Vignette: WE ARE FIGHTERS

*We're fighters, our family.* Dallas held the paintbrush aloft over the banner he was painting and looked up. *Can you understand that?* I made some pathetic response. How could I? The loss, the pain, the injustice, the fears, the anger, the conviction, the courage... They might have, like some, lain down and let life roll its course over them; suffered its fall-out with barely a whimper; taken its blows without looking to find whence they came. Not Delia and her family. Tooth and nail and blood and bone, they fought.

I was at their place less than a week before I was helping drafting a press release. The phone was running hot. Delia was campaigning for the immediate commencement of a housing renovation project at Jerrinja. There were television appearances and radio interviews lined up, letters to be drafted, representations to politicians, legal advice to be sorted through, appeals to the Ombudsman... Delia works the media and legal-political system to the nth degree... But she doesn't see the battle ending there. *We (our family) don't think the only way to live is under colonial rule... You're not going to get justice going through the system. You can work through them but you don't base your whole struggle on it...*

The family has been struggling against the powers-that-be for generations. On her mother's side, Delia describes a line of strong, strong women fighting to survive on rations, battling under the manager's tyranny.

Delia's father, Jack Campbell had been a fighter and before that his mother. Story has it the Campbell family had to flee Burnt Bridge after Islet Millie Campbell fired a shotgun past the local inspector's head. He had come to take her son away. The family packed their things and moved southward, settling at Salt Pan, a fringe camp on the outskirts of Sydney, and it was here that Jack learned his early political lessons, listening to Jack Patten and the Anderson brothers stirring against the Protection Board and spruiking for Aboriginal rights. As a young man he took deep stock, while doing contract work for the Board, as he watched the Moyleys' impassioned efforts to

protect reserve land at Burnt Bridge from resumption. Later he would take up the same battle against the threatened closure of the reserve at Roseby Park.

Jack's portrait hangs in the centre of the room, above the fireplace, at Nan's, his painted profile silhouetted against the Aboriginal flag. His head is bound in red string to mark his status as a *Dhan-gadi* law-man. Like others he had come to the south coast, following crop picking work. He met and married Nan Wellington after the war and settled down with her people at Roseby Park. From his new home, Jack took up the crusade for Aboriginal rights becoming a leading activist amongst Koories in NSW. He forged strong ties with the union movement, founded the South Coast Legal Service, was a director on the board of Tranby Aboriginal College and was an early member of the NSW Aboriginal Land and Rights Council, whose pre-emptive claims were instrumental in the establishment of NSW Land Rights legislation. He fought battles on local issues to secure Aboriginal ownership of the reserve, new housing and to protect land and sites against council's development plans.

From all accounts, a man of strong passions and flaring temper. *He wouldn't let anyone tell him what to do.* Many a caller was sent on their way. The tale is merrily told of his punching an official who came around trying to lay down the law.

The family remembers with bitterness the way people on and off the mission had laughed at Jack Campbell as he took his crusade onto the streets. *Shame*, they said. *They were too scared to march with us*, says Nan, *but they were happy enough to reap the benefits.* There is acrimony in Delia's voice, *Everybody's getting on the bandwagon now; where were they the last thirty years of struggle?*

Delia had taken up arms along side her father. She'd learned the art and force of political campaign and alliance, become an eloquent and fearless spokesperson for her people and developed a broad network of contacts with Aboriginal people across the state. She took an active role, as an appointed consultant, in the development of NSW land rights legislation and has filled the role of chairperson of the local land council, has worked as a heritage officer, represented indigenous Australians in Geneva and at other international forums.



With Dallas I went for a walk, through the heathlands, out to Boat Harbour. He showed me a place where Koories had camped before, some old exotic trees marking the place their huts had been. He and his brother came sometimes to fish. I struggled to follow him, as he leapt nimbly from rock to rock, to a spot, quite high, jutting over the blue water off the bay. Here Dallas pulled out his reel, attached some bait to the hook. He unwound the line, laying neat coils on the rock at his feet and cast out, a long way. With intent fingers on the line, he brought it slowly back, jaggling from time to time. It wasn't long before he had caught several fish. Each was carefully unhooked and placed splashing in a rockpool until it was time to head home.

In the 1980s, when the government was threatening to relocate the Garden Island naval facility to Jervis Bay, Delia entered into a strategic alliance with the conservationists. Bunkering down in a house at Currarong, a cunning protest plan was hatched. With the Australian Navy gearing up for major joint manoeuvres with their New Zealand counterparts, Delia, Nan and a few other traditional owners, set themselves up in protest on the bombing range helipad. Meanwhile, small parties of demonstrators secreted themselves in various locations about the range - a human defence shield against the planned bombings. The Navy sent in its negotiators - Delia laughs at the special tent they erected - but the protestors on the helipad remained unmoved. Eventually the police escorted them off, all the while Nan challenging them to make an arrest. Delia's daughter, Charmaine was amongst those who hid in the bush with the greenies. She tells of seven days, seven days of lying low, survival and argument. Naval planes were sent in, with their infrared technology, but they only managed to turn up a colony of kangaroos. In the end, unable to locate the protestors, the Navy was forced to abandon the exercises.

It came as a terrible shock when Nan was laid down by a stroke; her left side paralysed; the light suddenly stolen from her wilted face. It was a struggle for her to speak and there was no smile. Dallas and Charmaine went over what had happened; they spoke of the omens which had foretold misfortune - dancing willy wag tails, the cry of the crow. Nan would battle her way back, a fair way back - her fighting spirit not to be quashed - but it was a difficult and trying time for the family.

Dallas was just merging back from a stint living in Sydney. He'd been working for the National Native Title Tribunal. There were hardly any Koories employed, he said, and he felt that people there didn't really understand. He couldn't see much benefit coming of the whole thing. *Why should our people be forced to prove who they are?* He'd had a taste of house sharing with *gubbahs* up there too and he didn't like that either. His flatmate, Martin, was always whingeing about having no money. Dallas felt so sorry for him one day he gave him \$70, which the friend promptly spent at the pub. He then humbugged his mother for money which disappeared just as quickly on dope. The guy spent \$2,500 on a stereo, at the same time complaining he had no money. Dallas was disgusted. *I told him he didn't know what it meant to be poor.* He said he was going to let Martin have the lounge chair they'd bought together because he cared about material things, whereas Dallas didn't.

We were on our way to visit Nan at the hospital. I was driving. Dallas sat in the passenger seat beside me. *You think you're a pretty good driver don't you?* Some silence. *You must have been spoilt as a child.* More silence. *I hate gubbahs. They're aliens -* nervous giggles from the back seat. *An old Wiradjuri man told me once, gubbahs come from outer space. They're the only culture in the world that doesn't show some connection to the land.*

For many years it was the political struggle that was foremost in Delia's mind but as time moved on she began to reflect more seriously about her Aboriginal cultural heritage and spirituality.

So far as Delia is concerned the life rope for Aboriginal people entwines two vital strands - cultural identity and empowerment or spiritual awareness and political consciousness. One must understand the political situation and the political system and then be prepared to go beyond that but one must first ground oneself, and draw ones priorities, vision and discipline from Aboriginal cultural heritage. It isn't easy, Delia admits for people in her situation.

*The old ways,* says Delia, *never continued on.* People like her grandmother and great grandmother were strong but they were living difficult lives, battling to survive under measly rations and oppressive mission managers. *(And they) could see what was*



coming ahead, and they could see it wasn't going to be good. So a lot of them decided not to speak about it no more. Delia is sombre - that's effected us. It makes it really hard for us - but there is no defeat. It may not have such a terrible effect, though. It forces us to go back; it puts pressure on us to make contact with our identity, our spirituality... For Delia there came a pivotal moment of spiritual awakening.

At Honeysuckle Bay the sea slaps a gentle rhythm on the sand. Delia wades in, a cool shock registering each new step. At waist height she takes the plunge, swims out a short distance and emerges skin tingling, invigorated. Relaxing back in the water, she lingers with the feeling of lightness and casts a long, slow gaze around her. There is something, suddenly, which draws her attention. On the shore, up on a ridge, a dark shape catches her eye. She strains to see. An animal? It moves, vanishes, reappears. Delia finds herself up and out of the water, crossing the sand, following a narrow track through the bush, all the while her eyes focused on that one spot, until she is there too, standing on the ridge. Only now it is gone. There is no noise, no movement, no trace. In the stillness and quiet, Delia raises her head to the east and, looking out, finds herself overcome by a powerful sense of *déjà vu*. She is there for a long while.

That was the first time. After that she kept coming back, back to the same place, as often as she could - mostly on weekends because she was working then - until she started to feel and to understand. And it was beautiful then, and she felt at peace, and she could tell the old people were there and she knew that she belonged.

There were times when being on the mission really got to Delia. It pained her, she said, to see the way people were living out their lives and to think of what had gone on there, how people had suffered. To her mind the physical confinement of the mission had been accompanied by a constriction in thinking. It was as if, over the years, a malaise had set in and, weighing down upon hearts and minds, blinded everyone to the truth. Only Delia *could* see, with super clarity, what had gone awry, what people were lacking, where the answers lay. And Delia felt herself a one-man band, blowing trumpets, banging drums, clashing cymbals, trying to get people to see. She got mad, she pushed, she prodded, she pulled, to no avail. The knowledge sat, a heavy burden on her shoulders alone.

*I remember something my father said a few weeks before he passed away. Delia reflects. He said, you're going to have a hard life. I didn't ask, you don't question why. I've worked it out, this is what's happened. It was as if Delia didn't choose the struggle, the struggle chose her. Or at least it was there, plain as day before her eyes, and Delia could see no choice but to take it up. That responsibility has been a heavy burden on my shoulders for the last ten years. I can understand how poor old dad and Uncle Perc felt. They was burdened with it too... Others knew what was going on... (they) were aware what the old people were trying to do. (They knew) what it was. They took no interest...*

*Being an elder shouldn't be confused with being a senior citizen. An Aboriginal elder is someone respected by the group, involved in looking after culture, in exercising discipline. You don't have to be an old person - sixty or seventy. You can be a young person. It's based on knowledge, on understanding and on carrying it out in practice. You can't just carry that knowledge around inside your body. You've got to act it out.*

*Our people here are laden down by a loss of cultural identity... We've got a lot to sort out. This is what happens by having society breaking down. We can revive all that, its not as if its gone forever... I don't know what the other family clans sit and do and discuss about who they are... Our people are getting sick. I wonder if they stop to think about why they're getting sick. I wonder if they ever think about if you don't look after your law and customs and sacred sites you might get sick... Me and Nan and our family, we were going to go out and establish our own art site. We would have been responsible to look after it; it would have been part of our continuation. Our people should be thinking about it. I'm sure it hasn't even entered their minds. It's what keeps people and land together spiritually. Problem is with our people in the way they're thinking. People should be aware here of the knowledge they're denying themselves...*

*Ethel Bundle's spirit comes to me. Even though I wasn't old enough to understand when she was alive... Its just there. That spiritual presence is very much there. It's up to them. People have got to make a choice. People will end up losing their identity if they don't think about it.*



Think of a magnifying glass tilted just so, concentrating the sun's rays in a beam of burning intensity. So Delia fixes her sight on her ends, a searing path, pure and unswerving, unmoved by other calls, allowing no deviation. She works her way through the endless details, legal intricacies and moral implications of a myriad of issues of local, national and international import, scorning at the parochial outlooks of others on the mission and at their political naivety and ignorance. There are constant battles being fought on multiple fronts. . . Nothing washes over. Every word, action, letter is clamped upon, scrutinised, assessed and mentally filed away. She takes lessons wherever and however they come to her, constantly extending her knowledge, expanding her vocabulary, refining her tactics. *We'll know better next time.*

There'd been more than one occasion Delia had shown Judy and company to the door. Temperatures were incinerating. *I wish I'd been through the law and knew how to point the bone and make them sick*, Alfred burst out. *"My son will be going through, no question"* followed Charmaine. *We need lawmen to rid this community of evil*, Delia said, *It's not too late for Alfred and Dallas . . . we've got connections, including family at Croker.*

There's not much room for anything else but the struggle with Delia. Dallas puts it this way, *My mother's got no private life*. People often turn to Delia when there's some difficult dealing to be done with the world out there but, otherwise, they keep their distance - *she only ever talks about politics* - and when she's about, they're on their guard lest they fall prey to some caustic attack on their lifestyle. It's a lonely place.

When the old pilot station came up for grabs I called a meeting across the factions; it seemed too good an opportunity for the community to miss and I thought everyone should be involved. How could I presume to hold it all together?

Delia beat home her disapproval in no uncertain terms. *No anthropologist or white consultant is going to come in here thinking they can solve the community's problems. You've overstepped your mark, interfering in politics. You'll be gone in two months and then what? The political issues here need to be resolved, what we need is*

*healing. Writing a submission, that's the easy part. Someone needs to be there to drive the car.*

I dropped the thing like a hot potato. I suppose I let some people down. It happened more than once.

I didn't get the message then. The way stories told in disapproval of others were obliquely directed at me, like parables. There were the tales of other white visitors who had spent their time reading books about Aborigines instead of talking to them; there were tales about their stinginess; there were the head-shaking condemnations of Goops and the way she spent time alone in the company of men.

*We've been thieved again, suffered another loss.* Delia nods her head in disgust over the gazetting of the Jervis Bay National Park Stage One. For over twenty years Jerrinja land claims around Jervis Bay have languished in State government offices. *Maybe I've become too hardened up against the establishment, against colonial rule. I can't see what they've been doing for us. Not so much hardened up, but not grateful. What do we have to be grateful for?*

I knocked quietly at the door and entered. Delia was sweeping the floor. She didn't look up. I shuffled from one foot to the other, stepping aside as she swung one chair, then another up onto the table. I thought I might type up the letter to Fisheries; I ventured. *You might as well do something useful.*

There is a generation of young people at Jerrinja whose cultural identity is firmly bound up with their impressions of the time that their Aunt Delia took them out on a special camping trip to Beecroft. Vinnie recalls, *"There was about 15 to 20 kids. First we stopped... went down to Target, we stayed there a couple of nights and then we walked all the way over to Gum Getters... And we slept underneath the cave and got taught about the stencils, and we all fished and all that sort of stuff... And then (we) walked all the way back and then went to Honeymoon Bay, so we did a pretty lot of travel, walkin'. Like we were sort of like on rations and not even worried about it 'cause we were fishin' and doin' all them sort of things. Fishing and playing. I asked whether they got a sense of how life had been would have been before. Mmm, we did.*



*Without washing. Like we didn't care about washing and how we looked and we were all shabby and we didn't have tents either, we just had a big canvas and all of us just got on top of that and slept under the stars. And it was good because it didn't rain at night.*

*And you wonder why I hate gubbahs.* Dallas' rage can not be contained. The words hurtle out, shrill and barbed with venom. *Whitefellas interfering in things they know nothing about.* (I feel a stinging pain in my right shoulder). Nan is worried, *We can't use other people's words, they'll come after us.*

*It's not as if we don't have our own word - Boorai,* thunders Delia. *What's wrong with those women?* A notice has been circulated; the Jerrinja playgroup has been named *Jargum's* after an Aboriginal word for children in the Bandjalang language. The blame is being landed on two white women married to Koori brothers from the mission, although there is scorn too for the silence of the Koori mothers. The way Mel and Kim see it is, *if we don't put effort in to get the playgroup up and running nothing will happen. It's for our kids too,* but the flak flying across the mission is that those white women think they're above the rest and are trying to take over.

Delia told me once how she hungered for the language they had lost. Looking back she sees how it once lay within her grasp. She paints a vivid image of an old aunt who used to visit, always dressed so prim and proper, with gloves and hat and stockings, and she remembers the way the old lady used to talk to herself all the time, in a language that no-one else could share. If only, Delia mourns, she had appreciated its importance then, when she could have asked. And there were other lost opportunities too. Dallas thinks of old Percy Mumbulla, who'd lived his last days at the nursing home, waking in the early hours to sing out in language; or of another old uncle who had tried to talk, but he - Dallas - had been too embarrassed to question him. The two rail angrily against Janet Matthews - listening to archival linguistic material they can feel the tide of the old people's knowledge dammed up behind stilted questions about single items of vocabulary. The tapes are a resource, nevertheless. Delia speaks positively of hopes for linguistic reconstruction. Dallas has listened to them time and time again, committing each unfamiliar item to memory - for there are many indigenous words which survive in daily Jerrinja parlance. And there is one surviving snatch of monologue, about a little bird, which Dallas studied

minutely until he had made every word and tone and accent his own and on occasion he speaks it out loud, sometimes over and over like a chant, so that one might almost imagine he had captured the language and everything that had gone with it.

If there was one thing impressed on Delia's children - there were certainly more - but if there was one thing, it would be that they must be sure to choose a marriage partner beyond the bloodline. Their grandfather had been adamant, the more distant the better. So when Charmaine went to an indigenous youth conference in Darwin, and met Jimmy and fell in love with the handsome, young Croker Island man, who wore his hair in a quiff and crooned like Elvis, the family's blessings were in order. When I arrived at Jerrinja, Jimmy was rugged up against the southern winter chill and enrapt by the birth of his first son, the beautiful Ngarndbali. Charmaine was very proud of her son and of the fact that he would have ties to his father's country, would learn its language and traditions and would one day be fully initiated, but she was determined, too, about his ties to *her* country and she wanted to make sure that everything was done in the proper way.

There was a quiet awareness, at Jerrinja, about a secret women's place at Jervis Bay; it's a place that men would think twice about going to. Everyone knows *bindji* means belly and has a reference to pregnancy. Charmaine quizzed her grandmother and great aunts. There wasn't anyone who could tell her exactly what should be done after Ngarndbali was born, but using what she could gather and feeling her way around she conducted a small ceremony. *...And that'll be his place - 'cause he has to take his mother's country before his father - well in our way down here, and I'm sure its similar up that way too... And when I was there, she said about that place at Bindijine, I felt like I was doing the right thing, like I had to be there because it's bringing back something; that that place in lots of ways had been neglected. And it had that feeling of not being neglected no more. It had that purpose. That purpose for women which was always the purpose.*

For years Delia and the family had been camping at Honeymoon Bay. They sometimes took groups from Tranby on educational tours. Delia got it in her mind that they were going to have a camping site of their own - out at Bindijine. She put her case to the head ranger at the park and to the naval commander-in-charge,



speaking eloquently, I am sure, of their traditional rights of ownership and custodianship responsibilities, of the needs of their people, especially of the old and the children, of the racism and hostility they experienced from *gubbahs* at Honeymoon and of the history of naval incursions on sacred sites. There would have been, I can imagine, an added caveat along the lines of 'and of course if you're not amenable we're just going to go ahead and set ourselves up there anyhow.' After a meeting or two Delia had secured in-principle agreement. At the end of a few months they had a Koori only camping ground, a portaloo on the way and a commitment to reopen the old access road. It was a moment of triumph, but from Delia's perspective merely the thin end of the wedge. There was talk sometimes about the start of their homeland movement.

There came the day when it was time to take my final leave with Delia. I steeled myself. I was chastened first for spending too much time trying to fit in with the drunks. Delia moved on to point out that since I'd been at Jerrinja all the old people had been going down - falling ill. *Not that we're saying it's your fault*, Dallas said. *But it (your presence) may have been on their minds*, Delia added with levity. She told me they'd had a smoking ceremony of Nan's house because there had been people with bad feeling in the house. She said she'd felt very peaceful and calm afterward and reminded me pointedly that Dallas and Alfred may yet get initiated into law.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### LOVING BLACKNESS AND THE POWER OF DIFFERENCE

At the local tennis courts close to Jerrinja two teenage boys from the mission found a group of whites and a Koori having a match. They approached them for a game with a pointed invitation, 'Do you want a game of doubles with us, since you're on our land?'

Decolonization...continues to be an act of confrontation with a hegemonic system of thought...As such, decolonization becomes the contestation of all dominant forms and structures, whether they be linguistic, discursive, or ideological. Moreover, decolonization must be understood as an act of exorcism. (Nehrez cited hooks 1992:1).

In this chapter I will address some of the strategies which are employed by people at Jerrinja in the face of shame and show that a variety of responses is exhibited across the community and by individuals contextually. This will highlight the fact that a bounded community or group need not be homogenous internally; that it can contain and encompass difference.

#### **Owning a shameful identity**

'To *own* your people', to recognise and maintain your relations with kin, to stand by and support them, is, as I have argued, a major moral imperative at Jerrinja. Beyond the immediate commitment to kin the concept encompasses a broader loyalty, a commitment to an Aboriginal identity. When Nan told me that her great-niece and nephew, who had come to visit on the mission, always *owned* her, I detected a tone that always seemed implicit in the notion, a tone of self-deprecation mixed with a defiant, bristling pride, as if to suggest that such ownership involved the embrace of

an inferior or untouchable status. In that particular case, Nan's comments were, I felt, in part to do with the acceptance of her degraded physical state - a slight stroke induced paralysis - but this served only to highlight the fact that, in the context of the shame that surrounds Aboriginal people under white domination and oppression, the conclusion to which *owning* your own people leads is to the *owning* of a degraded condition.

Justice Pat O'Shane reflects,

I used to get the impression that... somehow or other, to be a 'true Abo' amongst urban Aboriginal communities you had to behave and think like a mongrel dog that had been kicked into the gutter. That's how Australian society has always treated blacks and without question; I mean, I grew up with that...(O'Shane 1994:39).

In tracing her family history, Sally Morgan recounts a visit to Port Hedland where she met with people who were her relations,

An old full-blood lady whispered to me, 'You don't know what it means, no-one comes back. You don't know what it means that you, with light skin want to own us.' We had lumps in our throats the size of tomatoes, then. I wanted desperately to tell her how much it meant to us that they would own us. My mouth wouldn't open. I just hugged her and tried not to stop (1987:225-226).

After the first phase of colonisation, writes Nandy, the post-colonial critic, after the 'bandit-kings' have robbed, maimed and killed, comes the 'second colonization', the conquering of consciousness,

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once (sic) for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds

(Nandy:xi).

The internalisation, to varying degrees, of hegemonic ideologies, coupled with the pressures of various incarnations of assimilationary policy, racism and accruing socio-economic disadvantage, have in the past - and no doubt presently continue to - induce some people to forsake the norms and values of their Aboriginal lifeworlds for the alternatives presented by the dominant order. But if some have sought, historically or presently, to improve their and their children's lot through conformity, attempts to pass (as non-Aboriginal) or even resorted to 'breeding out the colour' (Reay and Sitlington 1948, Fink 1957, Tucker), others have employed different strategies to define and redefine their position in relation to the mainstream order.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that the initial response to the internalisation of white racist ideology by the black person,

is either to ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else (to) want them to be aware of it. I try then to find value for what is bad - since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the color of evil. (Fanon 1995 [1968]:325).

In dealing with the denigration and low status of Aboriginality in the mainstream, one option for Koori identity formation is to incorporate inferior positioning, negative stereotypes and pessimistic expectations into the sense of self, so as, in the first place, to afford some predictability to their experience but, in a tactical move, to maintain a positive sense of self by reclaiming these so-called vices as virtues.

Julie Carter (1988) has written about the way in which Koories incorporate racially derogatory remarks in daily conversation, and particularly in the socialisation of children, as a strategic intervention. The repeated use of racial slurs, like boong and dirty blackfella, within the secure home and community environment, are said to diffuse their power in the mainstream, inuring their subjects to abuse, but also - and more importantly - imbuing such terms with alternative, positive value. 'Metaphors of stigma', Carter writes, 'are both inverted and transformed to provide an expressive mode of affirming group and individual Aboriginal identity' (Carter 1988:65).



Such a tactic might well be seen to underlie the emotive content of Koori identity identified above - a rebellious pride in a subordinate or pariah status – and, similarly, what Fink saw as an aggressive assertion of low-status in Barwon<sup>1</sup>. Aborigines there, she claimed, acted in ways opposed to the standards of the mainstream, as if to say,

Look at me - I'm coloured and I'm dirty, drunken, lazy, irresponsible like they all say - that's my privilege, because I'm coloured - I can do as I like, because that's what they expect of me anyway (Fink 1957:103).

The tactic is subversive but also fraught, for as it plays with the hierarchies of domination, it also in one sense affirms them. It is a weapon, but certainly one of the weak. At Jerrinja, even as a young woman speaks her resistance against white supremacy, she reveals her sense of locatedness at the bottom of a hierarchical relationship. 'In our generation now, we think that we're like - we think we're up there with 'em. We look at them like we're better.'

More directly, the avenue of answering back through verbal or physical challenge constitutes another strategy. In confronting racism and social subordination, people at Jerrinja recount the way in which they have challenged racist slurs and defended their dignity through physical fights. Schools, hotels and sportsfields continue to be places where Koories fight for their honour. The use of humour as a tactic of resistance has been noted by other authors (eg. Cowlshaw 2004:45).

The assertion that Aborigines are better than whites - grounded firstly in a negative critique of white societal values and affirmed through the history of black/white relations - represents a critical line of offence. Consciousness that they are a people forcibly and wrongly dispossessed of their land, whose ancestors were subject to violent and inhumane treatment, who themselves have, and continue to, suffer numerous humiliations and injustices, allows them to turn the moral tables on the structurally dominant. At Jerrinja, shared memories of life on the mission, particularly under reserve management, create a sense of solidarity. Those tales of the

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<sup>1</sup> Although as I have earlier noted it is important to consider how alternative value systems may also be

impositions of the authorities, and resistances against them, form a store which feeds an oppositional stance toward whites and provides a ground for broad inclusiveness, where the machinations of community politics produces bitter divides. The sufferings of some Jerrinja residents in children's homes and other government institutions including jails have left lasting trauma for some and acute feelings of resentment toward whites.

Kapferer writes,

Increasingly, especially over the last 20 or so years, Aborigines have discovered a vast reservoir of symbolic power, perhaps convertible into actual power, in the exterminations, land alienations, divisions of families, abductions, rapes, incarcerations etc... Aborigines (victimhood) challenges the very techno rationality which legitimizes the institutions of dominant power (1995:77).

But such traditions have a longer history. The words of Frederick Maynard, leader of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, instance its public, political expression in 1927,

I wish to make it perfectly clear on behalf of our people, that we accept no condition of inferiority as compared with European people. Two distinct civilizations are represented by our distinctive races... That the European people by the arts of war destroyed our more ancient civilization is freely admitted, and that by their vices and diseases our people have been decimated is also patent, but neither of these facts are evidence of superiority. Quite the contrary is the case (Maynard cited Goodall 1996:163).

Similar traditions have subsisted in the private discourses of Aboriginal people for longer still, although their capacity to be heard and to impact on white consciousness has altered with shifts in the mainstream political and intellectual environment.

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at play here.

According to Cowlshaw, 'discourses of victimology' generated at the centre of the nation have led Aborigines increasingly, and unproductively, to assume the role of victims (2004:79). Revisionist histories now colour and remake the memories of, and past understandings, of race relations (2004:204). Cowlshaw's argument rests on her assertion that aggressive racist prejudices are a relatively recent product of the (ostensible) political and legal dismantling of structured and institutionalised inequalities over the last thirty years. But if she asserts there was relatively little emphasis on pain and resentment in past accounts - and I argue there are ample examples of both positive and painful memories of interactions with whites - where then is the source of the identity born of oppression that Cowlshaw posits as the prime motif for Aboriginality (2004:11).

Cowlshaw uses in illustration, the case of happy and innocent childhood memories, including one man's admission that as a child he didn't realise the significance of his being made, with other Aboriginal workers, to eat outside. His childhood lack of understanding, however, does not preclude the fact that the adults accompanying him read, and were affected by the situation differently. Moreover, my own research would suggest that, even where children may not have understood the nature of race relations, there was often an inchoate sense that there was something disconcerting, imbalanced and frightening in situations of interaction between black and white<sup>2</sup>. It might be truer, as James Baldwin has written, about Afro-Americans that 'there has been almost no language' to describe the 'horrors' of black life. If revisionist historical perspectives, albeit generated at the centre, lend a new name for that pain and shed light on its origins, then the sense of victimhood generated may serve as a rallying point for solidarity and for the raising of radical consciousness.

Without needing to foreshorten the history of racial hostility, we can appreciate Cowlshaw's point that the bestowal of equal citizenship rights and anti-

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<sup>2</sup> Recall the man's sense as a child that there was something frightening about the manager's presence at this mother's home (p.216), or Nan's childhood notion that there was something unfair about her uncles having to provide fish for the inspector (p.183). Such perceptions were further reinforced by Koori stereotypes of whites as 'mean and cunning', by the obvious discomfort and ill-ease which commonly marked black/white interactions.

discriminatory legislation, fired hostile sentiments because they upset the definitions of, and relationship between, the two racial groups whose identities and relationships had previously been defined and structured by inequality. But if some whites have found the concept of Aboriginal equality affronting, it is, as the burning of a replica of the Aboriginal flag by the Shoalhaven City Council mayor demonstrates, the assertion by Aborigines of different rights and, moreover, radical claims to separate and prior nationhood, which has generated new levels of hysteria.

### **Redeeming difference**

The assertion of difference, coupled with rights grounded in Aboriginal laws and customs, forms a powerful axis for boundary making and boundary staking on the part of a structurally disempowered minority. Although limited in their ability to pursue the matter of sovereignty - the Australian courts having ruled that they have no jurisdiction to consider the question of the sovereignty of the State - on moral grounds, there is little defend Aboriginal claims that the European arrival was an illegitimate act of invasion and that the indigenous peoples never ceded their rights.

The battle to define, locate and defend rights in terms of Aboriginal difference has formed the focus for identity and life purpose for a number of people on the mission, but none more so than Delia. Having related, in the prefacing vignette, an account of her story, I will now consider why, given its apparent empowering nature, this position seems to have been resisted by many.

### **The politics of identity**

Although the forces of racist hegemony are insidious and at deep levels difficult to shift, Delia is one who might be seen, in terms used by bell hooks, to have worked consistently towards the achievement of a decolonized state of mind (hooks 1992:1).

A fundamental task of black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe and invent ourselves in ways that are liberating (hooks 1992:2).

Black folks who 'love blackness' ie. who have decolonized our minds and broken with the kind of white supremacist thinking that suggests we are inferior, inadequate, marked by victimization (1992:17).

As well as her efforts to debunk white myths she, and her family, have also, as this account shows, sought to creatively reclaim Aboriginal culture. It is here that her efforts might come under critical scrutiny by writers like Keeffe.

Keeffe's arguments, briefly examined in the introduction, should be further addressed. In a 1988 article, Kevin Keeffe examines what he calls the 'ideology of Aboriginality' under the twin themes of resistance and persistence (1988:67). Aboriginality-as-persistence he argues is based on a notion of an inherited culture, often expressed through the medium of blood or genes, in which a spiritual connection to land, 'caring and sharing' and an orientation toward kin are the primary elements (1988:69). The underlying premise of Keeffe's work is that any real link between urban Aboriginal people and classic traditions has long been severed. By making a point of the contradiction between notions of inheritance and the need to 'learn the culture through formal and artificial means' (1988:72 & 69), Keeffe takes his first step in what amounts to an overall effort to debunk the validity and worth of Aboriginal constructions of identity grounded in notions of persistence. Keeffe makes essentialism, particularly spiritual essentialisms, a key target. At one point he launches a caustic attack on the 'absurd mystifications' entailed in interpretations of contemporary Aboriginal behaviour in terms of 'traditional' dispositions such as the 'walkabout mentality' (1988:72). His condemnation of Aboriginality-as-persistence is grounded, furthermore, in what he sees as its political conservatism. Finding its major expression, so Keeffe argues, in 'safe' forms such as the arts, Aboriginality-as-persistence is rejected as not only non-threatening to the dominant order but vulnerable to cooptation. Valuable energy, as Keeffe sees it, is diverted into the 'realms of "culture" ' when it could be directed toward campaigns for social, economic and political equality (1988:75).

The scorn dealt to the theme of persistence, stands in marked contrast to Keeffe's heroism of the concept of Aboriginality-as-resistance. The major elements of this

second strand of Aboriginal identity, Keffe argues, are a revisionist outlook on history and an oppositional engagement with the dominant order. Keffe commends Aboriginality-as-resistance as 'a living set of cultural practices...explicitly (and oppositionally) interactive with contemporary white society' (brackets added) and maintains that in comparison to 'persistence' it is 'more active, conscious, dynamic, modern and political' (1988:73).

In respect of Delia's practice Keffe, then, would no doubt support the emphasis on the sufferings, injustices and ongoing inequalities which have beset Aboriginal people since colonisation; salute the reclamation of Brogher, who Delia has redeemed, from the pages of local history, as a resistance hero; and positively esteem her active engagement in political and legal battles, with the powers that be. But as for her efforts to stake claims to cultural continuity, and to reclaim a spiritual inheritance, these would no doubt be a matter of scorn.

In addressing scepticism over the grounding of contemporary Aboriginal constructions of self in terms of persistence and essentialism, and in countering the critiques directed at cultural renaissance and reinvention, three important points will be made. In the first place, a good deal of such scepticism arises from an assumption of acculturation and ignorance of the extent to which cultural beliefs, social institutions, moral perspectives and practices with indigenous roots of origin do endure; perceptions which this thesis has sought to counter.

Secondly, assertions of inherited cultural and essential difference and revivalist activity must be appreciated as important political strategies, playing a critical role in maintaining distinction, defining group membership and furthermore, constituting the ground for alternative claims to land and political sovereignty. The imaginative resurrection of the past is a necessary feature of identity and ideological formations for all people, but it is not a free for all taking place within a vacuum. There are limitations on what individuals have to work with, and there are historically and culturally determined prerogatives, shared by limited sets of people. The observation of Strauss and Quinn is pertinent,

Even when intent on reinventing themselves, people do not pluck new cultural forms from the air; their imaginings and reinterpretations always rely on understandings learned and imbued with motivation. Culturally variable, internalized schemas shape both the ways people define what is in their self interest and the means they use to obtain those goals. This does not assume bounded cultural systems...But new forms are still always incorporated, rejected, and remade in terms of previous schemas...By focusing exclusively on conscious goal-striving theorists ignore the complexities of internalized beliefs and underestimate, especially, the force of out-of-awareness knowledge and feelings (Strauss and Quinn 1997:25-26).

While Barth - in noting that political innovators may pay 'a great amount of attention ...to the revival of select traditional culture traits, and to the establishment of historical traditions to justify and glorify the idioms and the identity' (Barth 1970:35) - gives the impression that these innovators consciously and perhaps manipulatively work to this effect, Carter Bentley has pointed out the efforts of leaders in formulating ethnic symbolism is not consciously devised in guile. Citing Cohen he writes, 'choices of strategy do not appear to be the product of conscious deliberation' (Carter Bentley 1987:41). In the case of leaders,

The enchantment of habitus operates at least as strongly on ethnic leaders as their followers...the symbolism of ethnicity will carry the same sense of authenticity and moral compulsion for ethnic leaders as for their followers (Carter Bentley 1987:43).

Further to the issue of the politicisation of culture, it should be noted that Keeffe's claims for the non-political and non-productivity of Aboriginality-as-persistence are no longer possible in the present legal context of Native Title, where proof of cultural continuities forms the basis for legal entitlements to reclaim land. Regardless of whether Aborigines in settled Australia have any chance of satisfying the demanding requirements of present legal frameworks, the maintenance of claims to biological and cultural continuity with indigenous ancestors, forms the basis for alternative claims to land ownership and sovereignty.

The final point is made with reference to Edward Said's remarks about the efforts of decolonised people's to reclaim a 'repressed native essence' in response to histories of slavery, colonialism and 'most important – spiritual dispossession' (cited Battaglia 1999:119). It is for good reason the loss of law, culture and spiritualism serves as a local explanation for community disconsolation. Colonialism not only dispossessed Aboriginal people of land and political independence but robbed them of socio-cultural and metaphysical institutions and epistemologies critical to physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing. The quest to redeem them as sources of meaning and empowerment should be seen as no less politically salient than the quest to reclaim lost territory. In sum, Delia's efforts to combine and politicise both culture-as-persistence and culture-as-resistance represent an understandable, legitimate and effective strategy to counter the domination of a colonised minority.

### **Resisting resistance**

If then, Delia effectively employs images of the past, both indigenous and colonial, and the potential for spiritual reawakening, to creatively imagine a community (Anderson 1991) with strong cultural traditions, clear economic and political interests and compelling claims to rights as against the Australian nation-state, the question which begs answering is why - as she complains - has she had such limited success in persuading other Jerrinja residents to take up residence in that community with her? Notwithstanding possible links between underlying shame and 'colonial rage', to use Cowlshaw's term, Delia's decolonization of mind would appear to have enabled her to overthrow, consciously, the sense of self-doubt and inferiority, lack of confidence and esteem which marks the majority of Jerrinja residents' interactions in the mainstream, to acquire a high level of expertise and prestige and to accrue material resources and political gains for herself, her family and the broader community. Her vision seems to offer an alternative positive and politically empowering view of Aboriginality, why then the reluctance of others to embrace it?

Amongst the Afro-American population of the United States, hooks has also noted that,



Despite civil rights struggle, the 1960s black power movement, and the power of slogans like 'black is beautiful,' masses of black people continue to be socialized via mass media and non-progressive educational systems to internalize white supremacist thoughts and values (hook 1992:18).

The question of mobilising the masses through a revolution of consciousness has, of course, been a perennial dilemma for social theorists and visionaries alike. Following Carter Bentley (1987), a small observation will be made here. New ideas, are - as the previous quote from Strauss and Quinn points out - mediated through old ones. For a new idea to have appeal it must resonate with the experience of those who receive it. The theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977) bids us to look at how habitus - bodily and mental dispositions - come to be generated in conditions of objective existence, and serve to mediate perceptions and actions. Similar cognitive, interpretive and affective orientations will be shared amongst those with similar life experiences, an argument also made by cognitive anthropologists (Strauss and Quinn 1997). In applying the theory of practice to the issue of ethnicity, Carter Bentley has argued that for individuals to be inspired by ethnic movements, these must offer not only material benefits but 'affective and cognitive satisfactions' (1987:47). 'The theory of practice', he maintains, 'suggests that those leaders will succeed whose personal identity myths resonate with evolving configurations of habitus, practice, and experience (1987:47). Arguably, Delia's personal identity myths are the product of a life experience which, while having much in common with her kin and others at Jerrinja, also has much which sets it apart. For this reason, the vision that she offers, fails to find resonance with, and, therefore, apparently fails to move the Jerrinja majority.

Although she has spent the majority of her life on the mission, Delia's upbringing and life history is unusual. As the above account reveals, the influence of her father, a man - said to have been initiated under Dhan-gadi law - with a fierce political consciousness was critical. Delia was brought up on stories of the hardship, oppression and terror experienced by Aboriginal people at the hands of whites and was inspired by tales of their resistance. From both her parents, she learned about certain traditional cultural aspects of Aboriginality and was impressed with accounts of the strict leadership and metaphysical powers of the old people. In the context of

the 1970s liberatory struggles, in the era of tent embassies, street marches and freedom rides, she closely partook in the strident political ideas and radical activism of her father, whose activities were derided by other members of the community.

Her subsequent experience in lobbying, negotiation and in employ with government officials, politicians, activists, developers and the media at local, national and international levels, her various official appointments in government, Aboriginal organisations and other non-government agencies all serve to equip her with a level of confidence, knowledge and competence in mainstream interaction which is far removed from the situation of most Jerrinja residents. Delia is by no means the only one at Jerrinja to have been involved in Aboriginal politics and in office bearing positions, or to partake in discourses and actions directed to acquiring rights and benefits for their people. However, the level and intensity of involvement, as well as her strong cultural perspective, sets her apart from most others.

The contrast between Delia's life history, and that of many other Jerrinja residents, creates a gap in their worlds-taken-for-granted. Drawn from diverse sources, and reworked in her own way, the cultural symbols and motifs with which Delia constructs her personal and broader vision of Aboriginality are not sufficiently shared with, or lack compelling semiotic and emotional force (Strauss and Quinn 1997:84) for other Jerrinja community members, to produce strong resonance. Although parts of it are appreciated, as a whole Delia's vision fails to speak to the meanings that many others at Jerrinja draw from their lives and their own sense of what it is to be Koori, and, on the contrary, is sometimes seen to challenge and negate them.

In the minds of some of those whom she has sought to influence, Delia's liberatory consciousness is associated with a harsh critique of their lifestyles and outlooks. As far as Delia is concerned, many of her fellow Jerrinja compatriots waste their lives in meaningless, mindless, self-destructive indolence and she, from time to time, enters into diatribes directed to that effect. For her part, others complain that Delia does not partake of the sociability expected of community members, unduly seeks to be 'boss over everyone' and monopolises resources, knowledge and political power.

Delia's political involvement necessarily brings her into close and frequent contact with non-Aboriginal people - some friends, some enemies - a fact which is seen, in itself, as cause for disapproval. Hence one woman criticised Delia on the grounds that while she discouraged children from school because 'she doesn't want white people telling kids what to do, yet she goes and works with them!' As the previous chapter has shown, to be *shame* in front of white people, along with the imperative to hold one's distance from whites, is an important component of self and group identity for the Jerrinja majority<sup>3</sup>.

Ironically, engagement in legal, political battles and other strategic interactions with mainstream players - albeit working to challenge, negate, undermine and manipulate - call for increasing knowledge, expertise and familiarity with the ways and values of opponents, reducing the distance between them. The involvement in political battles, Barth has suggested, brings opposing sides together in such a way that despite a strong emphasis on differentiating cultural diacritica they in fact become increasingly structurally similar leading to a reduction in the cultural differences between them (1970:35).

Some treat Delia's efforts to redeem cultural knowledge and spiritualism with cynicism. Like white sceptics, and no doubt influenced by them, many at Jerrinja feel empty-handed when it comes to cultural traditions and harbour deep convictions that they have no claims to the status of *real* Aborigines. In some views, attempts to revive cultural institutions would be disingenuous fabrications only serving to emphasise the fact that they are not *real* Aborigines. There are others who, unlike whites, are also apprehensive about cultural revival because they believe that 'messing' with culture and *law*, without proper knowledge, is improper and dangerous and that negative things could befall them as a consequence.

Finally, of course, if ideological differences can be seen to split the community, rejection of ideologies and political agendas is conversely the product of bitter factional divisions generated by scrimmages for the seats and spoils of office, ongoing

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<sup>3</sup> The imperative relates to white people as a class since many of those who take this position in fact have close familial relationships with white people.

and acrimonious family feuds, the disenfranchisement of peripheral families and other events in the history of social relations.

In spite of the foregoing discussion it should be noted that even though Delia herself feels frustrated by her inability to mobilise other community members, it is certain that, as a political leader, in an environment of changing external discourses and legal frameworks, she has been responsible for increased levels of awareness of Aboriginal disadvantage, social inequity, entitlements and political ambition on the mission and a significant politicisation in local discourses of Aboriginality<sup>4</sup>. She has also inspired the spiritual awakening of more than one. The effects over time, moreover, are likely to be cumulative. In this regard, there is a generation of now young adults who, as a result largely of efforts directed by Delia toward instilling them with a greater pride in their Aboriginal heritage and a resistant and political consciousness<sup>5</sup>, occupy a world-taken-for-granted that differs substantially from that of their parents. If it were not for Delia, the scene at the tennis courts, recounted at the start of this chapter, would, I think, have been a long time coming.

### **Racism and hegemony**

If change is slow, are we to assume in the meantime that the majority of Jerrinja residents exist in a state of unexorcised colonial possession? Have they like Willis' working class boys (1977), learned too well the hegemonic lessons which make them complicit in their own domination? Have they come to accept low status and pariahhood as intrinsic to Aboriginality?

What this thesis has been at pains to show is that, although they are harmfully affected by hegemonic discourses, the maintenance of an alternative domain of sociality, meaning and morality provides Koories with alternative perspectives in which to ground their own sense of value and from which to challenge mainstream doxa.

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<sup>4</sup> These have of course also been influenced by changing legal and political developments and the circulation of new public discourses in mainstream and Aboriginal circles but arguably Delia has been a major conduit for the spread of knowledge in this regard.

<sup>5</sup> As well as changes in their parents' outlooks.

Let's consider once again the question - which Cowlshaw says moved her to study the structure of racism in the first place - of why whites in rural Australia should engage themselves in 'regular, active and aggressive expressions of enmity' or 'racial hostility' toward 'what seemed like a powerless minority' (1993:186). For Cowlshaw, the notion of hegemony, Gramsci's concept of domination through ideological and cultural forms, is central to the explanation. White Australia asserts and produces its dominance by enforcing cultural conformity. Behind a 'benign egalitarian rhetoric', Aborigines are subject to 'an implacable cultural domination, a coercive value consensus' (1993:184). Their failure to submit to this pressure, their open negation of dominant social forms and values - flaunted in unruly behaviours, such as public drinking and swearing, or in the more innocent conduct of culturally specific practices, such as the frequent attendance of funerals - is seen to inflame white emotions because in it 'whites perceive a threat to their hegemony' (1993:186). In supporting Cowlshaw's position, Lattas writes,

For often it is the refusal of the Aboriginal body to observe the disciplinary regimes of white society (its notions of etiquette, quietness, and polite speech) which outrages those who require this body to show proper deference and respect to white culture and white bodies (Lattas 1993:242).

However, beyond their inability to civilise Aborigines and to make subordinate, disciplined and productive subjects of *them*, it would seem to me that the outrage and fury unleashed amongst whites by Aboriginal non-conformity must arise from the unsettling of broader ideological edifices which mask white people's own oppression. The refusal of Aborigines to buy into the capitalist ethic, the logic of the honest day's work and the drive to accumulate - and their ability to 'get away with it' - undermines the naturalness or common sense of the motivations which serve as premise for the reigning economic order. The great Aboriginal escape gives pause for reflection on people's own vassalage, and becomes a focus of bitter resentment.

## Conclusion

It is useful, following loosely from Gregg's 'distributed model of culture' (1998) to conceptualise individual Koories drawing on a repertoire of available themes and motifs in the construction of their identities, with the relevant features drawn and (sometimes idiosyncratically) interpreted according to the vagaries of their particular personalities, life history and present circumstances (1998:143-144). Such a model can account for variation between people while structural conditions leading to similarities of formative life experiences, life history and circumstance would account for considerable congruence (see also Strauss and Quinn 1997). Gregg's theory also makes space for intra-individual identity conflicts, contrasts and contextual negotiation. Heterogeneity can persist within the definition of one's group because the boundary depends not on a culturally homogenous interior but on socially meaningful distinctions that mark those who belong.

At Jerrinja the distinction between one's own people and others is key. The important injunction to '*own your own people*' derives its imperative force from two directions. In the first place, it emerges directly from indigenous traditions in which kinship and relatedness, and their attendant obligations, play the key organising roles in social interaction and identity. On the other hand, the imperative constitutes a reaction to the crushing and institutionalised disrespect and disdain which mainstream Australia has meted out to Aboriginal people as a colonised minority.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

In the present legal context, Aboriginal people who seek to have their Native Title rights to land recognised must enter into expensive, time consuming processes in which they are charged with proving affiliations to country through the demonstration of their unbroken maintenance of traditional systems of land tenure under Aboriginal law and custom. That those whose people were forcibly alienated from country, whose social institutions were devastated by population losses, social disruption and systematic cultural repression, are being placed in the position of subjecting themselves to such tests should also be caused for deep national shame. Ashis Nandy brings to attention a quote from Albert Camus which has resonance here, 'Through a curious transposition peculiar to our times it is innocence that is called upon to justify itself' (cited Nandy 1983:i).

In December 1998, the Federal Court handed down its decision in the case of an appeal by the Yorta Yorta people, of north-western Victoria, against an earlier finding that their Native Title rights had been extinguished. The decision, later ratified by the High Court, agreed with the original finding,

The evidence does not support a finding that the descendants of the original inhabitants of the claimed land have occupied the land in the relevant sense since 1788 nor that they have continued to observe and acknowledge, throughout that period, the traditional laws and customs in relation to their forebears. The facts in this case lead inevitably to the conclusion that before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ancestors through whom the claimants claim title had ceased to occupy their traditional lands in accordance with their traditional laws and customs. The tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgment of their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs. The foundation of the claim to native title in relation to

the land previously occupied by those ancestors having disappeared, the native title rights and interests previously enjoyed are not capable of revival. (FCA1998).

To Australia's great shame, current Native Title legislation amounts to little more than a revamped edition of the old doctrine of *terra nullius*, a legal fiction designed to deny Aboriginal people their rightful heritage.

The demand for continuity in culture and custom is - and probably invidiously so - misplaced. When one tries to grasp the nature of the Jerrinja or south coast Aboriginal people, as a group, by attempting to make an inventory of cultural traits and practices, one is bound to be troubled. In the first place, there is, as demonstrated in this thesis, a significant degree of variation in the lifestyles and outlooks within the group. Secondly, there are, notwithstanding the cultural features documented here, arguably more similarities between Jerrinja people and their non-Aboriginal neighbours than differences. Finally, as we have seen, if one seeks to establish cultural continuity between pre-colonial traditions and practices, as demanded by Native Title legislation, one is, in many respects, forced to weave with fragile threads.

Barth's perspective is liberating. He directs us - in the first place at least - to look for continuity not in some genealogy of culture, but in the persistence of the group itself, through its insistent upkeep of the boundaries between itself and other, despite the sometimes radical transformation of the cultural stuff within. The critical fact is that, over the entire post 1788 period, Aboriginal people have maintained themselves as a group in contradistinction to their colonisers. As Wolfe has argued, the crucial divide lies between invader and invaded (1994:116).

It is this type of argument which Cowlshaw takes to heart in her recent book. She writes,

Positioning as Aboriginal, as distinct from white, is not primarily 'cultural' differentiation expressed in social practice, but is founded on identification, loyalty, status and political participation (2004:32).



Yet surprisingly, little is made of the distinction of invader and invaded; Cowlshaw preferring instead to see the black/white divide hinged on 'cultures of complaint' (2004:36), with players on either side of the racial divide assuming the mantle of moral righteousness, each at pains to declaim the wrongdoing they have suffered at the hand of the other. Whites gripes about disorderliness and the destruction of property (2004:36) are juxtaposed against Murri complaints about discrimination, harassment and racial hatred (2004:43). While her argument is soon qualified (2004:52), Cowlshaw's counterpoising of the two groups respective moral claims - labelled as 'culture of complaint 1' and 'culture of complaint 2' - as if the two were, somehow, nullifyingly equal in value and, as if these limited concerns constituted the depth of Murri grievances, is unfortunate. Moreover, Cowlshaw's further claim, that both white racist hostility and Murri discourses of suffering are relatively novel innovations of the past three decades - in the first place, produced as a reaction to the disturbance of structural relations of inequality by anti-discriminatory reforms (2004:9), and in the second, product of a 'discourse of victimology' generated at the centre by revisionist historians, statisticians and white bleeding hearts (2004:79) - while providing certain insights, is overdrawn. In this thesis I have documented both a longer history of white racist hostility and greater time depth to postcolonial Aboriginal traditions of suffering which, I argue, have been archived not only in conscious discourse but in practical and emotional dispositions.

In addition to these rejoinders, it also serves pointing out that if Aboriginal consciousness is seen to be immersed in suffering, this may be a product of a neglect of alternative domains of meaning and satisfaction and an overfocus on the importance of black/white relations in the constitution of Aboriginal daily life and identity on the part of those anthropologists wedded to the resistance paradigm. Cowlshaw's positioning on anthropological debates surrounding Aboriginal authenticity in settled Australia is unequivocal,

...many anthropologists want to limit the extent to which contemporary Aboriginality can be characterized by its response to colonization. That is, rather than interaction with whitefellas and their institutions being recognised as continuing resources through which Aboriginality is reconstituted, there is a desire to privilege an 'independent' cultural heritage of traditional

Aboriginal culture. In fact I would argue that it is useful to see the experience of loss, of oppression, of marginalization and contempt as more significant, challenging, and contentious sources of Aboriginal alterity than are the traditions which have been the subject of the body of anthropological research. It seems to me that the nation has domesticated Indigenous visual art and dance, deleted languages, and erased the most challenging forms of social practice; it is the colonial rage of Aborigines that now challenges the nation, rather than a radically 'other' economy, philosophy or social organization (2004:195).

Aboriginal people are called upon to take the heroic position, with Cowlishaw lauding the exploits of those who challenge white hegemony through displays of disorderliness and violence while scorning the assumption of victimhood or the submission of shame.

Yet if the fact of their subjugation, and their resistance to it, forms a key concern, motivating force and identity construct, my problem with the radical resistance position is that it seems to suggest that it holds, or ought to hold, a monopoly. The argument made by Morris in respect of the institutional era is signal,

Group distinctiveness was generated in a social context [the institutional reserve] in which Aborigines experienced themselves in terms of a response to the agenda set down by the dominant society (1989:151),

Koories have, now and historically, had no choice but to be responsive to pressures and priorities set down by the dominant society, and may have been forced to draw certain limits around their lives to separate themselves from it, however, to argue that they experience themselves, their daily lives, their values and their actions, primarily in terms of resistance to outside forces, is to give insufficient recognition to the vitality of their own socio-cultural domain, to the endogenous issues, the pleasures, pains and politics inherent in it.

In positioning myself with respect to this debate, I am brought back to consider the other side to Barth's theory of ethnicity. For if he draws focus to the importance of

boundary making and distinction in the maintenance of ethnic groups, he also makes room for the preservation of 'backstage' domains of difference, where the reproduction of forms of sociability, cultural meaning and practice is made possible. It does well to remember that there may be some difference between those things used to speak Aboriginal difference and those which are lived beyond the interface. In this study, while I have drawn attention to the importance of the persistent reinforcement of distinction and opposition, to group survival, I have also sought to give greater scope and value to the retention of indigenously based local cultural forms, meanings and practices.

The preservation of private domains of difference, sociability and cultural practices grounded in indigenous traditions, need not be set in opposition to resistance and should not be taken as without political import. Deep running differences underlie more public forms of distinction, constitute the source for moral judgements and critiques of the dominant order, and provide the foundation for the assertion of alternative political rights. The Aboriginal sense of opposition, victimhood and struggle comes not simply from 'local exclusions and discrimination' (Cowlshaw 2004:42) but from the realisation and practical difficulties, detriments and legal entanglements resulting from their inability to sustain their meanings, values and rights outside the small confines of their internal domains.

I make no claim that indigenous cultural institutions, forms and understandings are preserved in pristine precolonial form. Barth was being optimistic if he thought that even parts of cultures could be 'insulat(ed)... from confrontation and modification' (Barth 1970:16). All have necessarily been transformed and newly remade in the tumultuous context of colonial claims over, and reorganisations of, land, bodies and minds. Nevertheless, I maintain that the social forms, meanings and values which characterise Aboriginal life today are the products of transformations wrought on a *particular* culture; that the particular oppositional stances that have confronted colonialism and have come to stand for Aboriginality in the contemporary context, are determined, not by values developed independently of the precolonial past or by some simple inversion of mainstream values, but by their salience within moral frameworks whose genealogy - although admitting the bastardry of colonial experience - also extends into the precolonial era.

In this thesis we have seen how the need, and the strategies for maintaining boundaries has changed over time. In the early historical period separation and relative cultural autonomy was facilitated by the lack of close development and relative physical and economic independence. As the physical and cultural distinctions between blacks and whites receded, however, the public showed an increasing consternation over the definition of boundaries, ostracising Aborigines from towns and public facilities where they could and creating strong pressures for increasing government intervention. Government institutional regimes enforced new partitions between black and white which, while aimed at effecting reform, ironically served to cloister Aboriginal difference and to shore up Aboriginal identities through resistance. In the face of pressures toward assimilation, which threatened the erasure of the boundary, Aboriginal people developed their own social sanctions which worked to protect the integrity of the group.

The dismantling of formal structures of segregation and discrimination and the increasing integration of Aboriginal people into the institutions and facilities of the mainstream undermined the grounds and means for maintaining distinction. In this context, I have argued, other mechanisms for the maintenance of the boundaries came to prominence. Cowlishaw has documented the rise in racist animosity. I have, within my research, identified shame as a critical mechanism for the ongoing maintenance of racial boundaries in the contemporary context, arguing that it serves both to effect the continuing exclusion of Koories from mainstream circles and to protect Aboriginal domains of cultural autonomy. Arguably, the fighting face of Aboriginality explored by Cowlishaw might be seen to play a corresponding role. The dangerous and hostile edge which is evoked by uncouth and rowdy behaviours, that leads whites to give groups of Aborigines in public spaces a wide berth, works to defend spaces of autonomy and privacy for a group which, otherwise, has little control over the use of space. This certainly holds in the case of Jerrinja where their reputation for bellicosity affords the mission effective protection against the trespass of casual busybodies, shortcut takers and even administrative authorities.

If different strategies and definitions have existed at different times, it is also important to note that alternative strategies may subsist at the same time in different

people, or at different times in different people and even at the same time in the same people. The tensions between indigenously inspired and hegemonic discourses, as I have shown, have generated a deep ambivalence around Aboriginal identity, characterised as I have argued, by the bristling pride which attends the Koori moral injunction to '*own*' and be '*owned* by your own people'.

In the postcolonial, global village context the sources for defining Aboriginal identity extend well beyond local frames, with national, pan-Aboriginal, anti-colonial, black rights and international indigenous rights discourses, all being brought to bear. In the face of such dizzying options and cultural fluidity, it is the self-conscious maintenance of boundaries which enables both the survival of the group and the preservation of common and distinctive interests, sentiments and outlooks.

Finally, I do not wish to suggest that there is only one boundary drawn, one notion of 'ourselves', rather different boundaries can be contextually drawn. The notions of one's people at Jerrinja can be referent to one's immediate family, one's broader kin group, one's Jerrinja colleagues, one's Koori comrades or to one's membership of an envisaged Aboriginal nation. Once again a range of criteria and motifs can be contextually drawn upon to foreground one boundary over another.

In the present legal political environment where the demands and opportunities of Native Title legislation appear to be consuming inordinate amounts of physical and emotional energy and resources in the production of - and acrimonious wranglings between - ever more fractious groups, it would do well for Aboriginal leaders to remember, rally behind, and put to good political effect, the boundary which has endured since the original invasion, that between coloniser and colonised.

Cowlshaw blames much of present Aboriginal despondency on the attitudes and influence of the liberals who wait with charitable kindness to minister to needy souls. Her own analysis is brave in that it is ready to countenance the angry, hateful, rebellious responses of Aboriginal people to their domination. I am forced, thereby, to question whether my choice to depict Aborigines as beholden to shame is signal of an imperial desire to maintain the colonised in a submissive, dejected, disempowered and non-threatening position; whether by extending a charitable, pitiful stance, I exalt

myself; and whether by identifying them as oppressing themselves, through internal racism, I absolve myself of blame. I may be guilty. Nevertheless, I still maintain a conviction that the airing by Aboriginal people of sufferings should be heard as a genuine cry of pain and distress, calling for redress and succour and not contempt. In exploring the more subtle, quiet resistances, private assertions of difference and shame filled experiences shared by many, and at different moments perhaps by all Jerrinja residents, as well as the more strident resistances, I hope to have elucidated important factors in explaining the nature and persistence of Aboriginal cultural autonomy; the nature and persistence of Aboriginal oppression and disadvantage; and the nature and persistence of Aboriginal resistance.

## APPENDIX 1

### SHAME IN CLASSICAL ABORIGINAL SOCIETIES

Drawing on the Australian anthropological literature, this Appendix will explore the role of shame in the installation and maintenance of socially valorised behaviour and in the constitution of the self in classical Aboriginal society. It will show that shame is, to use Levy's (1984) expression, an emotion which is hypercognised in Aboriginal society. It is highly visible, heavily institutionalised, socially valorised and consequently an emotion to which individuals are strongly sensitised. Shaming is employed as a technique of childhood socialisation and public social sanction, however, as I will argue, it is not effected only by external negative pressure but works also through 'shame-discretion' (Schneider cited Epstein 1984:33) as an internal regulatory device to ensure morally acceptable behaviour and positive presentation of the self (Myers 1986:121, 126). Shame is implicated in the definition and the conduct of social relationships both at a conscious level and as a socially informed bodily disposition. Relatedly, shame is also institutionalised as a prototypical and decorous behaviour for the expression of deference and respect. The emphasis on shame within Aboriginal society will be shown to be a corollary of the elevation within Aboriginal society of the values of relatedness and autonomy as identified by Myers.

#### Avoidance relations

Arguably, shame has emerged most prominently in the Australian anthropological literature, and apparently finds its most profound expression in classical Aboriginal society, in the special relations pertaining between a man and his actual or classificatory mother-in-law and in similar restricted relationships. For Cape York, Thomson documents the existence of a category of *kintja* or tabu relations with whom communication is restricted (1935:465). A man is not permitted to speak to his mother-

in-law at all and must use a special language and indirect speaking style to communicate with his wife's father and wife's brothers (1935:474). In contrast to those categories of kin where joking and sexual horseplay are quintessential, a man is strictly forbidden to swear or make reference to the sexual organs or to reproductive or excretory physiological functions, in front of *kintja* relations (1935:465). Observation of proper etiquette, Thomson observes, maintains a 'condition of euphoria', while serious breaches occasion shame, 'a state of disphoria' (1935:476).

Transgressions of the norms, according to Thomson, are considered ritual offences, and the resulting state of shame sometimes requires ritual purification for expiation (1935:489). Amongst the Koko Ya'o, for example, a person who swore in front of *kintja* relation, sometimes passed a lighted firebrand back and forth in front of his mouth, exclaiming 'my mouth is foul'. Thomson asserts that transgression of the incest tabu evoked a condition of shame, a 'ritual state of sin', so serious that the offenders had to be put to death (1935:474).

In his classic study, *Desert People*, Meggitt explains that the term *gunda-djari* "to be ashamed" is used in connection with behaviour towards the mother-in-law and other categories of restricted relationship. In such cases he argues avoidance is the 'fundamental rule'. Meggitt produces vivid images of the playing out of shame as he witnessed it. He describes a forced encounter between a Walbiri man and his ritual friend, a relationship usually marked by *gunda-djari* and particularly attenuated in this instance, as Meggitt explains it, by the man's recent failure to meet his obligations, under traditional law, to protect his friend in a fight,

The conversation, which the men conducted over a distance of 15 to 20 feet, was terminated as quickly as was compatible with intelligibility. Both men kept their heads averted, and Abe, as the junior, obviously suffered agonies of embarrassment. He literally could not stand still but sidled away from Jack until, at the last words, he fairly ran to rejoin the other men. His distress was so patent that I forbore to discuss the matter for some time... (Meggitt 1962:191).



Meggitt also recounts the behaviour of women forced, under reserve management, to collect their rations from men with whom they stood in strict avoidance relations, that is mother-in-law.

Usually, such women sidled up to the distribution table with heads averted. They held their ration-bags as far from their bodies as possible, so that loose rations could be poured into the bags without any direct physical contact between man and woman. Tinned rations that were handed to other women were thrown to the ground to be picked up by the "mmbd". No words were exchanged (1962:154)

An old man he writes, 'would literally jump in the air and flee when he came across a 'wife's mother', no matter how young she was' (ibid:191). Meggitt also records that shame would be attendant upon persons being witnessed in the act of sexual intercourse or in the case of a person exposing their genitals in mixed company especially where their spouse was also present, as this would cause the onlookers to contemplate the couple's sexual relations (1962:89).

Tonkinson documents patterns parallel to those observed by Thomson and Meggitt, amongst the Mardudjara of the Western Desert. Behaviours between kin relations, he observes, range from complete avoidance to uninhibited joking (1978:47). The relations between a man and his mother-in-law and a man and his daughter's husband, which entail complete avoidance, stand at one end of the continuum; other relationships including those with parents, siblings and the mother's brother are marked by varying degrees of restraint; while the relations between father's father and mother's mother, which are familiar and relaxed, typify the opposite end of the spectrum (1978:47-48).

Those relationships marked by restraint, Tonkinson notes, are accompanied by 'shame-embarrassment'. Such relationships also involve an asymmetry of status which necessitates a degree of respect and deference. Tonkinson documents that one must observe certain behavioural restrictions in relations with restricted kin relating for

example to 'touching, joking, the direct passing of objects hand to hand, sitting together, visiting another's camp, calling by name, looking directly at another while talking, and arguing with or (physical assault)...'(1978:47). The system is regulated, Tonkinson observes, not by threats of punishment but by a 'pervasive fear of shame or embarrassment' (ibid).

All three accounts of shame, Tonkinson's less so, are influenced by a rule-bound conception of society in which shame serves as social sanction against transgression. This comes through in Meggitt's explanation of why he and his wife, although, assigned to particular subsections were not expected to observe avoidance relationships. As he saw it, they were being exempted from the rules on the basis of the Warlbiri's recognition that they were 'amenable only to the Whitefellow law' (1962:154).

Within the main body of his text, Meggitt's interpretive emphasis on shame as a response to one's consciousness of having violated social rules (1962:190 & 191) does not sit well with his insightful ethnographic observations. Rather than a secondary emotion attendant on violation of rules, shame is shown to be fundamentally implicated in particular types of relationships. As Meggitt records, the wife's mother is herself referred to as *gadjin* or "shame" (1962:191).

In this respect, the sense of shame might be described within Bourdieu's terms as a disposition (1977:72) of the socially informed body (1977:124). The maintenance of avoidance between certain kin relations depends not so much on a conscious observance of rules and regulations but on the inculcation of a deep seated sense of propriety about one's relations with others..

Permeating bodily, psychic, linguistic and practical orientations toward certain kin, the sense of shame, I argue, produces what are seen as 'natural' reactions and intuitions of what is proper, requisite and possible. It is not necessary or sufficient to invoke an inventory of 'should and should-nots of behaviour towards various kin' (Tonkinson 1978:45) - the sense of shame produces a visceral aversion which makes 'touching,

joking, the direct passing of objects hand to hand, sitting together, visiting another's camp, calling by name, looking directly at another while talking, and arguing with or (physical assault)...(Tonkinson 1978:47)' repellent. A man refrains from lewd joking with his mother-in-law not, firstly, because it is prohibited by a rule but because he finds the idea of doing so unbearable. As Haviland's major informant at Hopevale told him, 'Young people here at the Mission talk to their mothers-in-law, fight and scold and curse. But we older people just can't.' (Haviland 1979:12). The same man, reports Haviland, 'laughed, somewhat uncomfortably' at the thought of addressing one's father-in-law directly (1979:10). As Haviland observes, 'it is from *muyan* 'shame' that one cannot bring oneself to speak in everyday language to a *dhabul* relative, to look at, still less to touch him or her' (1979:12).

Such an understanding of shame may allow us to put a different reading on Meggitt's interpretation of how he was viewed by his informants. Arguably the Warlbiri were not so much exempting the Meggitts from rules of avoidance as acknowledging their lack of a sense of propriety or shame which would automatically lead them to restrain their interaction with certain kin categories. Hence the refrain sometimes heard that 'whitefellas have got no shame'.

### **Myers and Pintupi shame**

While the previously mentioned works are informed by classic anthropological shame traditions, Myers lucid study, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* (1986) can be located within the tradition of the anthropology of emotion. In his exploration of emotion, selfhood and landedness, Myers identifies the twin values of autonomy and relatedness as the prime hallmarks of Pintupi notions of self. In Pintupi thought, he argues, autonomy is not opposed to relatedness. Shared identity with others is found to be critical in the constitution of Pintupi self (1986:104). 'One becomes complete and autonomous' not by achieving separation and independence but 'only through sustaining relations with others' (1986:110). Attitudes of egotism, selfishness, individuality, self-importance, private willfulness and presumptuousness which might be seen to deny one's identity with others

and to impinge upon their autonomy are negatively valued and, according to Myers, downplayed in public presentation (1986:121, 271).

Myers gives close attention to the place of shame in Pintupi society. He observes that *kunta* or shame is,

usually associated with the discomfort of being observed by others in the public domain, especially at being seen to do something that is poor etiquette, ill-mannered, or wrong (1986:120).

He notes that overt devices of ridicule and shaming are used, particularly to socialise children, while the well-socialised adult, conscious not to shame him/herself, regulates his/her own behaviour to present an acceptable public image - in this case the downplaying of individual egotism and the emphasis on relatedness and shared identity with others.

The image and reality of relatedness are maintained through fear of "shame", effectively effacing from the public domain the egotistical aspects of individuality (1986:126).

As Myers shows, shame is not simply activated through social sanction but through discretion. 'In its developed sense "shame" is a quality of the socialized person, involving a growing awareness of standards and propriety' (1986:121).

### **Shame and socialisation**

Another aspect of shame which has featured strongly in the Aboriginal literature is its identification as a key method of childhood socialisation (Hamilton 1981, Haviland 1979:225, Myers 1986:121). Fink observes that children are 'taught early to be sensitive of other people's laughter' and will make every effort to 'conform and accept the group's

standards' (cited Malcolm 1980:88) in order to avoid being the subject of such attention. Cowlishaw provides more detail account:

The display of tantrums or any kind of strong emotion is laughed at or at least stared at by older children, male kinsmen or outsiders. This is a powerful source of control for most children...A more extreme form of shaming occasionally occurs when older children are teased until they are beside themselves with impotent fury. This usually ends in the child standing in a defiant posture, arm back, as if to throw a stick at his or her tormentor, while sobbing loudly. Apart from some surreptitious giggles, the child is ignored and retires to sob alone for perhaps an hour before simply rejoining normal activities.

But most shaming is done at a much lower level. From the age of about two children receive little direct attention...To a child who has seldom been the centre of attention...the experience of having all eyes focused on it is alarming and to be avoided at all costs. Thus from about two years of age a child is aware of the glances and stares, remarks and reactions directed at it. These will of course be directed at behaviour seen as unusual or when the child makes a mistake or does something wrong...

..in an Aboriginal camp much entertainment is gained from foibles, errors and accidents of everyday life. Children are often the subject of these stories. While young, they may understand little of the story but the attention is an effective control, making them aware of the judgements of others. Thus a child will attempt to conform and not attract too much attention. There is fear of attracting either ridicule or a rare outburst of anger from certain kin. Public attention is usually painful to these young children, and it is this, I would argue, that is the main mechanism which teaches them which behaviour is not acceptable (Cowlishaw 1982:501-502).

The effect, so Malcolm argues, is to produce a 'shame-consciousness' (1980:87) in Aboriginal children; a consciousness which is seen to 'carr(y) over to the adult group.' (Fink cited Malcolm 1980:88). A continuing fear of being shamed or talked about by other people is seen as a major motivating force in ensuring social conformity amongst the population generally (Fink 1957:107).

Within traditional frames the possession of, and ability to demonstrate, an appropriate sense of shame is regarded as a necessary virtue. Harkins' observation that children in the Aboriginal classroom may demonstrate shame in accord with traditional conceptions of propriety concerning behaviour in unfamiliar environments has been mentioned (Harkins 1990, 1986). Myers has noted amongst the Pintupi that in certain, particularly public situations, demonstrations of shame or embarrassment are appropriate, as signs of respect, deference or humility. This is particularly so when dealing with strangers or non-familiars,

Even now, when people visit Pintupi communities from other settlements, it is clear that their behaviour remains somewhat restrained, that they exhibit "embarrassment," "shame," or "deference" (*kunta*) at seeming to assume too much (1986:100).

Kennedy and Donaldson too show that amongst the Ngiyampaa speakers of western New South Wales children learn that *kuyan* (shame or shyness), is the appropriate respectful behaviour to be assumed 'as a matter of normal propriety, in the presence of many people, including strangers both black and white' (1982:7), while in his study of Aboriginal communication styles in Central Australia, Liberman argues that shame and embarrassment are not only natural responses but are 'institutionalized' as a means of demonstrating one's discretion and good character (1985:27). A person should not, he observes, assert themselves too forcefully or draw attention to the personal selves of others. The protocols of communication such as the avoidance of eye contact, unassertive presentation, self-deprecatory comments, indirectness, continual renewal of license to speak and consensus building are all designed to these ends (1985:105). The

sense of shame becomes, as I have argued, and as Myers seems to suggest, not simply an assumed behaviour but a deeply ingrained sensibility.

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